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By DALE BOGARD
MURDER WITH ONIONS
By PHILIP WECK
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POPULAR DETECTIVE
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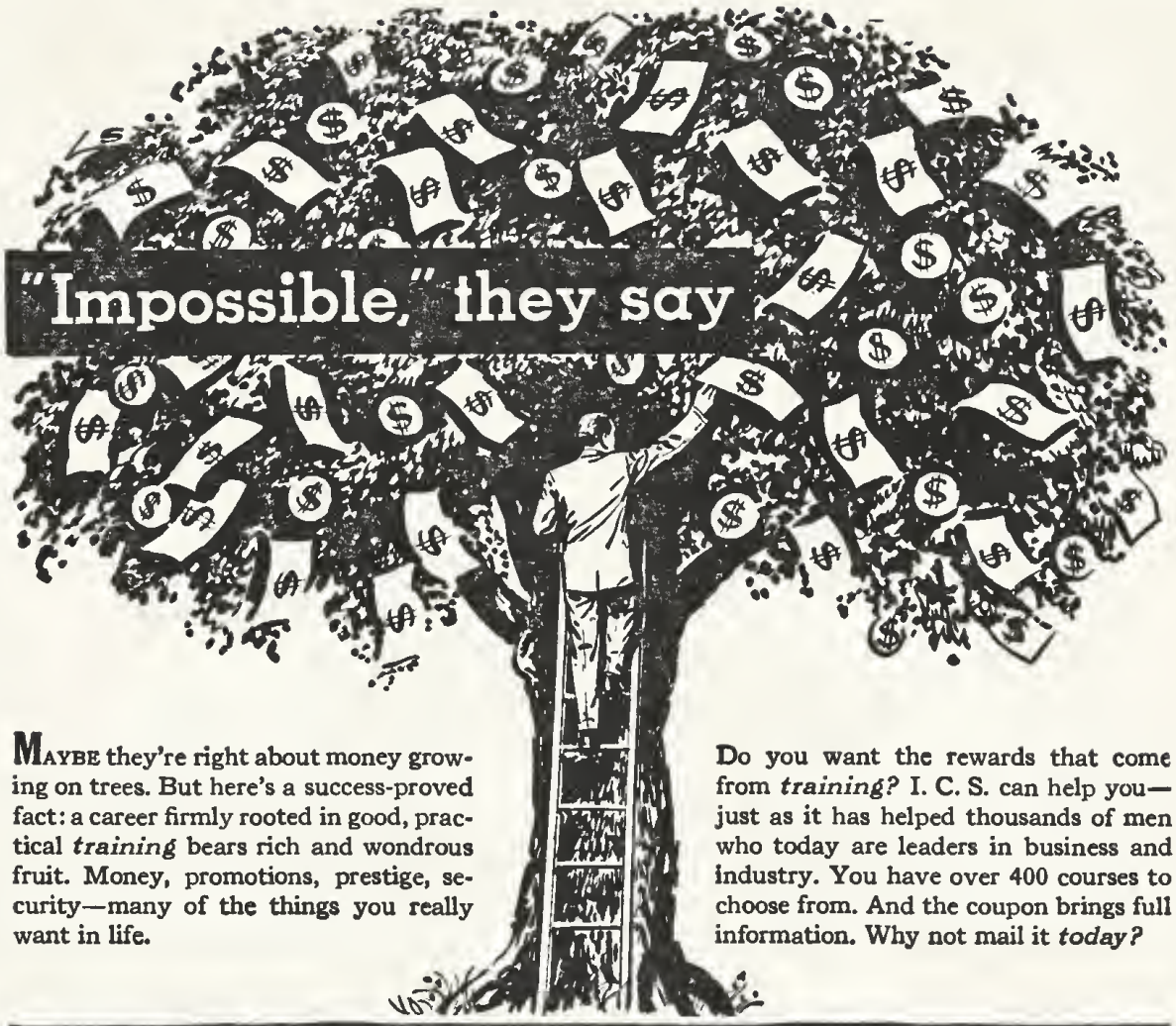

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POPULAR Detective

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

JANUARY, 1952

VOL. XLII No. 1

Featured Novel

SPEAK SOFTLY TO THE DEAD

By Dale Bogard

Many corpses blocked Bogard's search for the millionaire's love-child, but only ONE had a secret that must not be told! 10

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DAVID X. MANNERS
EDITOR

ALL STORIES IN THIS ISSUE ARE BRAND NEW

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), $3.00; single copies, $.25. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

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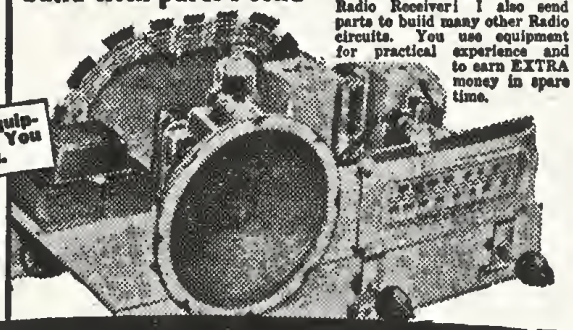

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I TRAINED THESE MEN

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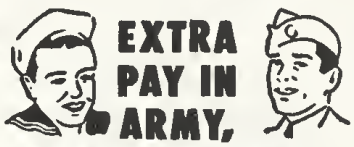

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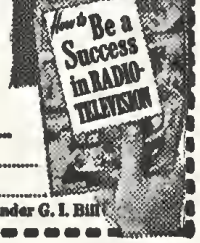

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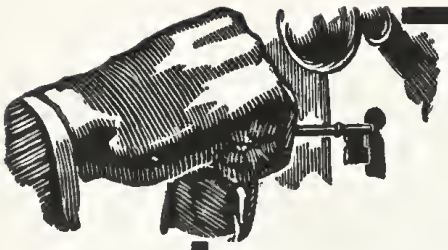

INSIDE STUFF

Who Is to Blame for the Dope Traffic?

THE item was a shocker. But it drew only a guffaw from my friend, the Cynical Sergeant, when I showed it to him. He tossed my newspaper back across the Charge Desk to me.

"Now, that, as the hyena says to the loon, that's a real laugh!" He jabbed a knife-scarred forefinger at the offending item, repeated aloud its concluding sentence: " 'The vicious tentacles of the metropolitan underworld are insinuating themselves into the small cities and towns to tempt our youth into a life of crime!' If that isn't the old fish-feathers!"

I had been aroused by the item. It concerned the horror with which local law enforcement officials had received the news that a group of high school kids had been experimenting with marijuana cigarettes—and maybe other unspecified forbidden fruit—at a town-edge roadhouse.

"I'm afraid," I said, "I can't join in your merriment. It doesn't sound so good to me. That marijuana—"

The Crime Syndicate

"Of course it isn't good." The old Sarge scowled down at me from behind his green-shaded lamp. "It's bad. What gives me the pain is the way the paper tries to switch the blame onto some big-city crooks. It's always 'the mysterious crime syndicate from somewheres else' that's behind a thing like this! Whenever investigators turn over a damp rock and find a lot of unpleasant uglies crawling around—right away they jump to the conclusion some Supercrook from Big-ville musta planted them there. Fish-feathers, I say."

"In a word," I suggested, "most crime is local, any way you look at it?"

"Aside from gambling, yeah. Any cop who's been in harness as long as I have will concede that the heavy-dough boys who ship in the slot machines to the joints and set up the horse parlors, or the numbers runners, have some kind of interstate organization. But like the song put it, 'You'll find your criminal lies, Right under your eyes, Right in your own backyard.' "

"The desire for a fast buck," I agreed, "is certainly not confined to the big cities."

"That's right. But putting it that way—" he flapped his hand at the newspaper—

"makes it seem as if we weren't really responsible, here in our own town, as long as there's that sinister octopus reaching out to seduce our kids. Of course, the movies, radio, and TV generally do have some high mogul of crime pulling wires from a thousand miles away. To a cop that stuff is phony because it makes people believe there's such a thing as a criminal class—when any beat-man who's answered muster room roll call for six months knows there isn't any such a thing."

(Turn to Page 8)

THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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Name.....

Address.....State.....

INSIDE STUFF

(Continued from Page 6)

"That's a broad statement, Sarge."

"Broad, and flat—and true."

But Is It True?

"You wouldn't try to kid me that there isn't a certain small group of guys in this town who give you more trouble than all the rest of our residents put together, would you?"

"No. But they didn't come from any one class, unless you call people who don't have an income of more'n fifty thousand a year, a class. There's young Bruce Kastelrauff, comes from a good old family, plenty of money, fine education . . . and he just gets a stretch for breaking and entering. Or take Verne Farrison, good job, nice family, doing fine . . . and goes up for three-to-five for handling a bunch of hot cars. No, in my considered opinion, there's no such a thing as a criminal class, for the simple reason that practically everybody's a criminal. Probably you are, too."

I said "Ah, now" because I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"I'll apologize if I'm wrong," he went on. "What I'm getting at is, a lot of so-called criminals who land in the pen get there because they didn't know enough or have enough to hire a good lawyer . . . before they committed a felony. Why, three out of four guys I book for serious crimes today are only breaking laws that weren't even on the statute books when I first put on the blue uniform thirty years ago. That's cold fact."

It was hard to believe. I said as much.

"Hell," he retorted, "there's a lot of things about our laws most folks would find it hard to believe. Do you know, for instance, that there are fourteen* offenses *besides* murder for which you can get the death penalty in one or the other of our forty-eight states today?"

I did not. I said so. I was shocked.

"Wait a bit, maybe I'll shock you some more. There was a guy around here, couple years ago—one of them statistical experts—gathering data on local laws and how many times they get broken by people who don't know they're doing anything wrong. He figured that the average joe, like you, would break enough laws every year on the average to be legally liable to spend nearly two thousand years in prison . . . and fined, in addition, more than two million dollars."

The Sarge looked serious. "Now ask yourself these questions. You ever been overdrawn at the bank? Ever made a claim for reduction on your income tax that might have been a bit larger than what you were entitled to? Crimes, both of them."

Broken Any Laws Lately?

On grounds the answer might intend to intimidate me, I refused to answer.

"Ever had a drink in a bar after closing time? Ever spent half an hour with a prostitute? Ever had illicit relations with

anyone?" the Sarge went on. "You'll find laws against all of them, and the penalties for violations, in any book of statutes."

"I begin to see—" I said.

"Wait, now. Ever gone to a stag show where they had strip teases that went the limit? Ever know of anyone else who did? Withholding information about a crime is a crime itself. Ever—"

"I give up," I said. "I'll go quietly."

"Yeah," he grunted. "I'll go with you, myself—and plead guilty, too. But now you know what I mean when I say there isn't any such a thing as a criminal class."

"Such a term shall be henceforth, for me," Istated emphatically, "strictly the old fish-feathers."

How about you, brother?

—Stewart Sterling

*If you want a list of them, I'll ask our Editor to print them next issue. Write and ask.—S.S.

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"I . . . I didn't kill them, Bogard." He jerked the words out with little driblets of blood and froth

TO THE DEAD

A Novel by DALE BOGARD

. . . whom you'll meet in this story as Private Eye Bogard

Chapter I

I HEADED into the Bowery walking under the El and stepping carefully over the sleeping bums on the sidewalk. Most of them wouldn't have known if I had stepped on them. They were beyond feeling anything until the hangover moved in on them with tomorrow's dawn. But for a few hours they had bought oblivion, and there were no bedbugs on the sidewalk or in the dark doorways along this street which once housed the élite of New York.

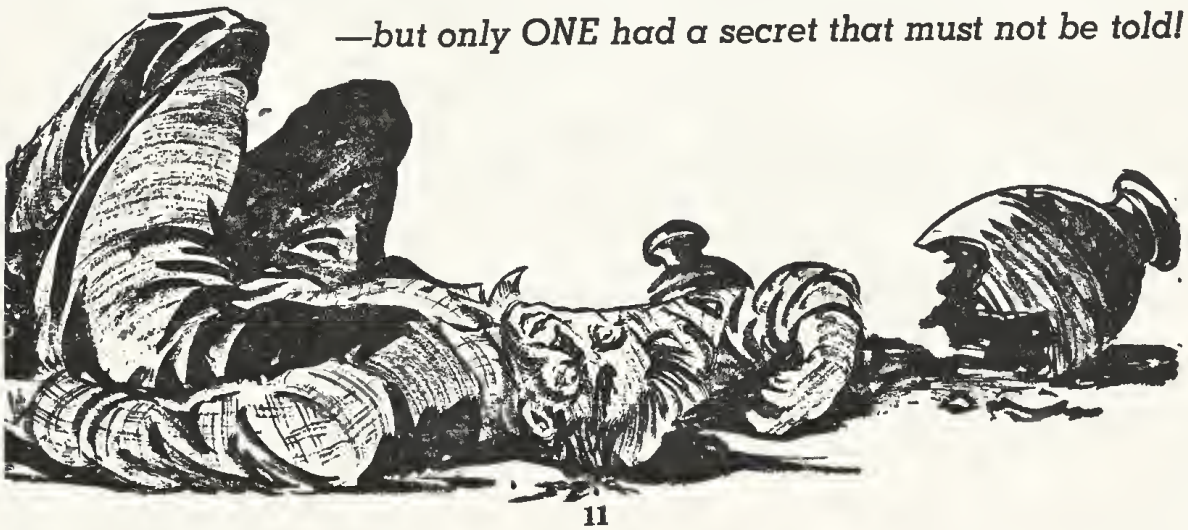
Not that I had business in the Bowery. But I had it nearby. I swung east along Rivington where the little shops overflow halfway to the gutters and the sweaty, friendly families of the Lower East Side come out to sit on orange crates in the hot stillness of a summer night. It was that kind of night now.

I pushed my hand into my blue gabardine and came out with the piece of paper I had ripped off a scratch-pad when I noted the address in the hurried telephone talk I had had an hour ago. My writing, which is one of the clear things about me, said: *Mrs. Thelma Farland, 79 Lansdon Apartments, 7 p.m. Ring until answered.*

The place was in a small cul-de-sac. Because the street was narrow and had no exit the heat seemed to jump at you off the

MANY corpses blocked Bogard's search for that millionaire's love-child

—but only ONE had a secret that must not be told!



blistering asphalt. It slapped your face in waves and moved hotly into your nose laden with a dozen mixed scents. The smell of watermelons, frankfurters and drying bras on pulley-lines predominated.

THE Lansdon Apartments were almost at the end of the little street. A stout Italian woman with blue-black hair sat on the front step holding a baby to one of her breasts. She didn't mind if I saw. She didn't mind if I didn't. She just didn't mind.

I moved past her up the five yellowed stone steps. Two boys in soiled T-shirts and cut-down slacks broke apart to let me into the entrance hall. Thre was a self-service elevator but it wasn't working. It was probably like that most of the time.

So I walked up three flights. The steps were still made of stone but now they were gray. The landings looked like wood block until you stepped on them and felt the tacky rubber composition under your feet.

Number 79 was at the end of the third floor corridor. I walked through the door into a tiny hallway and found myself staring at another door. The paint was probably green once. Or crimson. Now there was no way of telling. I leaned on the bell, listening to the tinny ring it made somewhere within. Then I could hear movements inside the room, so I took my elbow off the button and squinted down my new gabardine to the powdering of dust which was taking the shine off my shoes.

The door swung inward and a woman stood there. She wore a very clean faded print dress and had her bare feet in home-stitched mules. Her thick mousey hair was heavily streaked with gray and her skin was stretched like parchment over her high cheek-bones. Her eyes were blue and faded like her print dress. She was probably fifty years old and had once been very beautiful.

She said: "Are you Mr. Bogard?" Her voice was middle-pitched and literate. Long ago it had been warm and tender.

I moved my hat from my right hand to my left and said that I was.

A little flicker passed over her pale eyes. "It was understood that you were to ring until answered," she said.

"I heard you coming to the door—I thought perhaps I had rung your bell enough," I told her gently.

"I see." She stepped sideways and gave a little turn with her head. I moved past her into a living-room with a wide flat window which looked out over a string of back-yards and beyond them to a wire-fenced playground where the teenage kids were dancing and not caring about the heat which sent little rivulets of sweat oozing down their backs.

The room was larger than I would have thought. The bare floor had been carefully stained and its center covered with a couple of worn rugs. There was a big pinewood table against the window, an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard against the wall, half-a-dozen straightbacked chairs and a pair of imitation leather easy chairs drawn up to the iron grate the way people always draw them up even when they don't want a fire. No one in their right mind would want a fire anywhere in Manhattan tonight.

There were two internal doors, one either side of the room. I guessed that they led to the kitchen and the bedroom.

Mrs. Farland closed the entrance door with a slight click and padded up to me. She was about five feet five inches tall and still had shape. Once it must have been breath-taking. I wondered why she wanted a private detective, especially one whose name she had picked at random out of a phone book, but I didn't ask. She was going to tell me in her own way. I knew that.

Suddenly, she put out both hands and held mine. "I'm glad you have come," she said simply. "I didn't think you would."

"Why?"

I watched her underlip give a little tremble. Then the sign was gone.

"It . . . it isn't much of an address for anyone wishing to hire a private investigator."

SHE LET go my hands and walked across to the window so that I stood immediately in back of her. I could see that her hair was coiled in plaits and that little wispy strands escaped from the base of the all-the-way-down parting and trailed diagonally

across the nape of her neck. She stared out of the window for maybe a minute, not saying anything, not moving.

I said: "Your money is as good as anyone else's, Mrs. Farland. Why shouldn't you hire a detective if you feel you really need one?"

She turned then. The way she did it had dignity and poise. I knew she hadn't learned that in the sprawling slums of the Lower East Side.

"You quoted me twenty dollars a day and expenses," she said quietly. "I . . . I think

DALE BOGARD

I can pay that. But I would have to know what your expenses are likely to be."

I put my buttocks on the edge of the pinewood table and thought about it.

Finally, I said: "I don't know what my expenses are likely to be until I have some idea of the kind of inquiry you want me to undertake. Suppose you sit down and tell me about it?"

She nodded and we moved over to the leatherette chairs. She sat on the edge of hers like people do when they aren't relaxed and don't quite know how to begin whatever it is they have to begin. I sat facing her with my hat on my knees, trying to look the kind of strange man a lonely woman without much money would tell her secrets to. I didn't think I was doing it very well.

I asked: "Will it bother you if I smoke?"

She smiled then and for an instant I saw her face the way it must have been twenty years back. I knew I had been right to think it had once been very beautiful.

"Please do," she said. "It's been a long time since a man smoked in my presence."

I got out my pipe and stuffed tobacco into the bowl. She waited until I had it going, then gave a little sniff as though the smell gave her a tiny sensuous pleasure—as if it reminded her of something long gone.

Then she folded her hands in her lap and said, very quietly: "I want you to find my son, Mr. Bogard."

I let a thin column of inhaled smoke come out slowly. I took the pipe out of my mouth and got it in both my hands, holding it across the top of my hat. I said: "The Bureau of Missing Persons would get you results a lot more quickly and for free, Mrs. Farland. Why pay me?"

She went on sitting there with her folded hands and her faded eyes. Only now there were little lights in her pupils, as though some emotion had quickened inside her.

But her voice was calm and without any particular expression when she spoke.

"Because, Mr. Bogard, I do not want publicity to attend the inquiry."

I got my pipe back between my teeth, pulled some more smoke in and blew it out on the still close air. Very slowly and meditatively. It didn't help.

So I tried the routine questions.

"How long is it since your son disappeared, Mrs. Farland?"

She said, looking at me very calmly: "I have never seen my son, Mr. Bogard."

I put my hat on the floor and my pipe in the crown of my hat. Then I got up and sat on the side of her chair. I put an arm round her shoulders because I suddenly thought she was growing old and had seen trouble and had little money and no friends I understood that she was quite sane about what she was telling me.

There was a slight tremor under her thin dress. She said, without looking at me this

time: "You're making me feel rather happy, Mr. Bogard."

"Yeah," I said. "I'll have to charge it as part of the service. Now what were you going to tell me about your son?"

"I told you. I have never seen him."

"Yeah," I said again. "I thought that was what you said. Suppose you take it from there."

She went on: "Twenty-five years ago I had an illegitimate child. I was persuaded to have it adopted at birth. That is why I have never seen my son."

"Who was the father?" As I asked it I could fell her body make a little shrinking movement.

"James Caffrey Broekman," she said in a low voice.

I TOOK my hand off her shoulder and got a Lucky into my mouth. I said: "James Caffrey Broekman is very important people in the city."

"Yes." She said it almost as if to herself. Suddenly, she looked up at me and I knew what was in her mind.

"I don't think you're making anything up or pulling a fast one or going a little crazy in the head, Mrs. Farland," I said.

"Thank you." She reached up a hand and let it rest on my sleeve for a moment.

"But I still say that James Caffrey Broekman is very important people. You sure you can handle trouble from that kind of source?"

She shook her head. "No," she said, "I'm not sure. That is why I wish to hire a private detective."

"Mrs. Farland," I said, "I am employed to handle trouble and if it appeals to me I will handle your particular trouble—but it is fair to tell you that the only dope I hear around is that James Caffrey Broekman is very tough trouble indeed and requires very special handling. You know that?"

"Yes, I know." She sat there with a far-away look in her eyes. Then: "It wasn't always so. I remember Jim when he was just a nice boy down from Harvard. What the magazines nowadays call a photogenic type. He wasn't tough at all. We met at a country-house party in Rhode Island. I can remember it as if it were yesterday. I had been with some friends to the Narragansett track. . . ."

She paused and shot me a quick look. "My family hadn't any money. My father was an actor and not a very successful one—but he gave me a good education. That was how I came to have friends like that. Mother died when I was a little girl."

For a moment she stared into the fireplace. "It was the oldest story—we fell madly in love and weren't very careful. His people found we had been away together and parted us."

I said: "That doesn't sound like the tough James Caffrey Broekman. I mean to allow his parents to interfere in his life that way."

She gave me a little twisted smile. "They were smarter than most parents of their kind. They were smart enough to persuade him that I was a good-time girl who went around taking all the scalps in sight."

"Did you?"

"No." She paused. "But there had been one other man. He was married. I didn't know that—until there was the usual scandal. He held an executive job with the Broekman plant in Long Island City. The family got him to smear my name. They also tricked me into being seen with him again . . . just the once. Jim saw me. From that moment he never spoke to me."

"Who was this man?"

Mrs. Thelma Farland spread her hands. "Does it matter?"

"It could. I don't know. But we'd better have it all."

She shrugged as though the name was distasteful. "George Schilton. He lived here in Manhattan. He was five years older than me. I never saw him afterwards. I don't know whether he is still alive."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Go on."

"Later, I found I was going to have a baby. Jim's baby. I wanted to go as far away from the Broekmans and their friends as possible. But I had the baby right here in New York—at the Women's Hospital on West 109th Street. That was in the summer of 1927. I was persuaded by friends to have it adopted."

"Why do you want me to find him for you after all these years?" I asked.

She unclasped her hands and said: "Because he *is* my son, Mr. Bogard. You have no children?"

"No," I said, "and I know you're going to tell me I wouldn't understand. And I wouldn't, either—just the way I don't understand how a mother lets her baby be adopted by another woman and gets maternal twenty-five years later."

Hell, Bogard—do you have to be as brutal as that?

BUT it didn't seem to bother her. She picked up again: "I appreciate your viewpoint, but you must remember the circumstances. I was an unmarried mother, my father had just died, I was entirely alone in the world and hadn't much money. You can perhaps imagine the frame of mind in which I was persuaded to part with my baby. I am sure my few friends believed they were acting for the best." She added, with a sudden surge of emotion: "But I have never ceased to regret it. Now I want to see him . . . before I die."

I got off the chair and spun my cigarette into the empty grate. "Okay, Mrs. Farland. I'll take it on. And you don't have to worry about those expenses. I'll keep them down."

"I don't expect you to work at a loss, Mr. Bogard. I have a little money. I live here because it is cheap . . . and because I like helping in the mission church here. I have some very good friends among families the Broekmans would shudder to know."

"Yeah," I said, "I can imagine how the Broekmans would shudder."

She smiled. "I only want to know that my boy is happy and well. If he is, he need never know I am his mother. That is all I want to be done."

"Any clue about who adopted him, when it took place? That sort of thing?"

"I don't know the family who had him, but the date was July 31, 1927."

"What was your name then?"

"Thelma Lucy Farland."

I stared.

"I have never married, Mr. Bogard. I am still Miss Thelma Farland. I find things a little easier if I pretend to be a widow. You know—in the way of getting an apartment and similar things."

I nodded. What I was thinking was that the case was just routine. I didn't think Thelma Farland had ever tried, and the adoption authorities wouldn't have opened up to her if she had—but they'll talk a little if you can make them think you can call up some law. I thought I could do that.

I walked back across the room carrying my hat and lighting another cigarette. "I'll report to you tomorrow at five P.M." I said. "I think I'll have found him for you by then."

Her faded eyes opened, but she didn't say anything.

Something else struck me as I reached the door. It was nothing to do with me, but I like to know things.

"Just how are you going to see your son when I find him for you?"

"I can walk past the house, maybe get a job in the neighborhood, see him on the subway or at a lunch counter . . . there are a lot of ways if you start thinking about it," she said softly. "I've thought a great deal about it, Mr. Bogard. . . ."

I looked back at her standing framed against the window, smiling a little to herself. Suddenly, I understood that she trusted me. I tried to look like a man you can trust and for no reason that I could think of I felt a little cheap.

So I went softly out through the door, along the tacky corridor and down the steps. There was no one in the entrance hall, but outside the stout Italian woman was still sitting on the front step. She had finished breast-feeding the baby and was crooning to it, rocking it gently to and fro in her big arms.

"Goodnight, *signora,*" I said.

She flashed her large white teeth at me and nodded her head amiably. I started for the open end of the little street and that was when I saw him. He was tall and thin and his nose stuck out from his face exactly like a big white eggshell. He was inside a pay telephone booth almost opposite where the Italian woman was sitting with her bambino. I turned in my stride and walked back to her.

"The *signor* in the telephone booth—he live here?"

She gave her blue-black hair a shake. "Never see him before. He came down the street some little way behind yourself, then went into the booth. A very long call it must be, *signor.*"

"Thanks." I walked across the roadway toward the booth. I knew he was watching me. I was halfway across when I also knew he was doing something with his right hand.

I went down flat on my stomach as he slid the door of the booth open and fired.

Chapter II

HIS GUN gave a sharp little crack and the slug pinged into the stonework of the tenement. I rolled over on to my side, reaching for my old Luger—but he was weaving in and out between the women and children on the sidewalk.

Halfway to the end of the street a big blond boy made a grab at him. Eggnose fired again and the boy jumped back nursing his right hand and watching the blood flow out between his fingers.

I stood up, shaking the dirt off my suit. I didn't even try to follow. It was late. I walked back to the tenement, looking for the slug which bounced off the stonework. I found it at the bottom of the basement steps. It was a slug from a .22 target gun and I thought it had been aimed deliberately not to hit me. I thought that because guys who pack that kind of artillery don't usually make mistakes. I was still looking at it when I heard the siren.

There was no way to get out so I sat down on the steps by the Italian woman and held her baby for her. It was a very pretty black-haired baby, maybe five months old, and had three small white teeth. The ruckus had awakened it and I had just got it off to sleep again when a prowl car slewed into the gutter and a thickset harness bull with grizzled hair and a gray pallor that had nothing to do with ill-health poked his bony nose out of the door.

"Hiya, McNulty," I called.

His little pig eyes narrowed, then opened out. His mouth worked against yellow teeth that looked too sharp.

"For chripessake, it's the shamus," he whispered. "Here, Charley—see what we got."

The other bluecoat, a slim youngish guy with nicely slicked hair, peered at me.

"Hell," he said, "Bogard's got a baby. Well, 'tain't no sin." He made a laughing noise in his throat because he thought he had said something funny.

McNulty stood looking down at me. "You fire a gun just now, pal?"

"No." I told it to him still sitting down because I didn't like McNulty and anything I could do to make him mad I was going to do.

"Some bird threw a gun on some bird," he said. "We heard it, didn't we Charley?"

Charley said they did. I could see that Charley would have to jump backward through wire hoops if that was how McNulty wanted to conduct police work.

"You see a gun fired, pal?" McNulty asked it softly.

"Yeah," I said.

"Who fired it?"

"I don't know."

"A guy or a dame?"

"A guy."

"Who'd he fired at?"

"Me—but only in a general sort of way."

McNulty splayed his hands on his broad hips and let his belly shake so that I would know he thought something funny was going on around here.

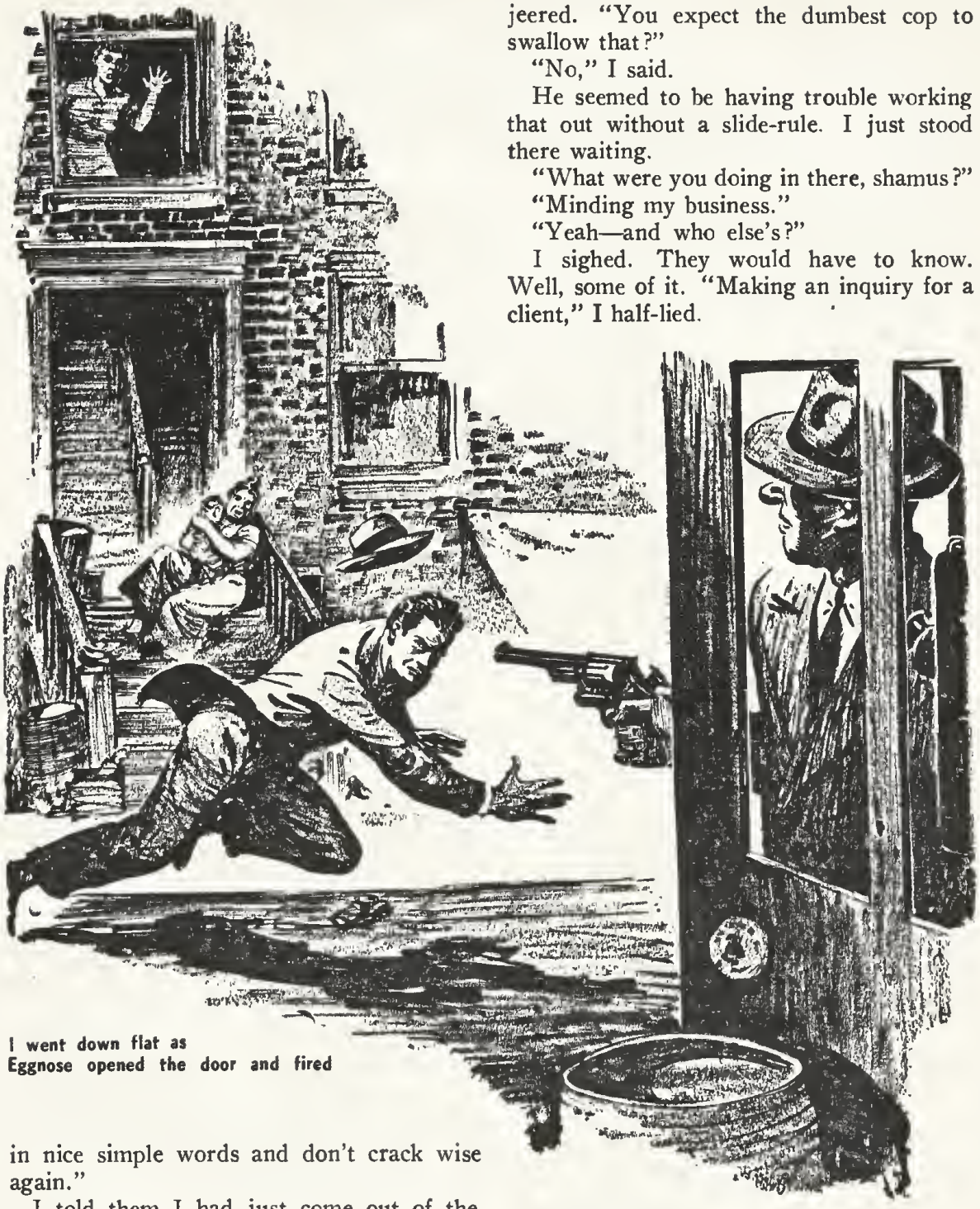
I said: "The baby's pretty, isn't she?"

"Huh? Why, yeah, she is." I knew he hadn't meant to say that because he bent down and said in his tight copper's voice: "I ain't asking about no babies, pal. I want to know what the hell you meant saying this bird shot at you in a general sorta way."

"I don't mean a thing," I said. I got up and handed the baby back to its mother. McNulty squared up to me, swinging his balled left fist to and fro, looking for a chance to plant it on my chin with an alibi which would stand up at Police Headquarters.

I COULD feel his breath when he spoke. I could also smell it.

"Tell us what happened, shamus. Tell it



I went down flat as Eggnose opened the door and fired

in nice simple words and don't crack wise again."

I told them I had just come out of the tenement when I saw Eggnose in the call booth. I told them what happened after that but I didn't tell them why I went into the tenement in the first place.

McNulty gave a little grin and I knew he had noticed the omission.

"So you just walk outa the tenement and a guy you never seen before opens fire," he jeered. "You expect the dumbest cop to swallow that?"

"No," I said.

He seemed to be having trouble working that out without a slide-rule. I just stood there waiting.

"What were you doing in there, shamus?"

"Minding my business."

"Yeah—and who else's?"

I sighed. They would have to know. Well, some of it. "Making an inquiry for a client," I half-lied.

"What kinda inquiry?"

"A client wants me to trace her missing son," I said. "She—"

"Yeah, yeah—you can save the rest." McNulty sniffed. "Sounds like you're on the way out, Bogard, handling them sorta two-bit angles. Looking for punk kids who take a runout on their moms. No more ritzy

dames and Cadillacs, huh?"

"Any way you want it you can have it," I said.

McNulty seemed about to say something, then thought better of it and jerked a thumb to the police car. I got in, stuck both arms on the back of the driving seat and blew cigarette smoke between the two of them. McNulty told the blond boy to get in beside me. The boy had a lot of blood on his cuffs, but it was only a nick.

The young bluecoat was speaking into the radio-telephone. He gave a succinct and accurate summary of what I had told them. One day he would start moving up and McNulty wouldn't like it because McNulty had moved up as far as he was going. Soon he would start drinking just a little too much and when he laughed there would be a hard little ring in his voice and he would let go unguarded remarks about the way the service had passed a good man up.

Meantime, he drove the prowl car into the Bowery with the purely automatic skill of long practice, turning into Canal and then driving west onto Lafayette.

A big gray-haired officer old enough to remember when policemen walked around swinging their nightsticks instead of riding everywhere in prowl cars was on desk duty. He was holding a heavy old calabash in his own teeth, so maybe he wasn't doing badly for a fifty-year-old. He started entering details.

That was when Detective Lieutenant Desmond O'Cassidy leaned his shoulders against the doorway and shook a cigarette out of a crumpled pack. I saw him out of the corner of one eye and I didn't say anything.

He got the cigarette glowing, pushed his out-of-shape hat a little farther back on his pale forehead and gave a tug to the old belt which held his faded raincoat together. You hardly ever see O'Cassidy without his raincoat. He always thinks it is going to rain—even on a night like this.

McNulty said: "Bogard was shot at by a guy in a phone booth on a dead-end street off Rivington. We're getting a report."

"Did you get the fellow with the gun?" O'Cassidy asked it as he took his shoulders off the lintel and moved into the room.

There was a little flush on McNulty's suet pudding face.

"Charley Jenson and me heard a shot two-three blocks away. When we got into the street the guy was gone. He shot this kid on the way out."

A police surgeon was fixing the boy's hand for him.

"What's your name, son?" said O'Cassidy gently.

"Frank Scherzy," the boy told him. He spelled out the surname.

Cass said: "Polish?"

The boy answered steadily: "Yeah—my dad was. So what?"

O'CASSIDY grinned at him. "Nothing. My wife is Polish and my five sons are half-Polish and half-Irish. How d'you like that?"

The kid stopped acting tense and flashed him a broad smile. "I tried to stop the guy when he run along the sidewalk after shooting outa the phone booth. I guess maybe I shouldn't do things like that."

Cass said easily: "Why not? It shows you got what it takes, son."

He appeared to see me for the first time, though we're supposed to be old friends. "Hiya, Dale. You got trouble again?"

I grunted. "I got McNulty," I said. "No difference."

Cass leaned against the big raised desk. "Okay," he said, "shoot the works."

I went through it all again, point by point. Still leaving out the same points. Still not giving anything away about James Caffrey Broekman. I still had a client, hadn't I?

O'Cassidy looked at me queerly.

"So a guy you never see before fires a scare-shot because you go into a tenement and have a little inquiry about somebody's long-lost son?"

I told him he was right to think that. I also tossed in one of those Bogard smiles. It made him change expression about as much as the Father Duffy statue at Broadway and Forty-seventh. Or any other monument in this monumental city.

"Who was the client?"

"Mrs. Thelma Farland. She lives in the tenement."

McNulty grated: "He didn't tell us that."

Cass went straight on. "This missing son, now—does he have any link with the shooting?"

I said tersely: "I don't know."

"Just what do you know, Dale?" O'Cassidy asked it in that soft voice he uses times.

I gave myself another cigarette and flicked the match onto the floor. Cass always leaves his on my carpets, anyway.

"All I know is that I have a client and that I owe her something. Everything else that may be relative you already have from me."

A little grin crinkled the sides of his long mouth.

"Okay," he said. "Maybe we let it go at that for the time being. Maybe the guy with the gun don't have no connection with your client. Maybe any damn thing you like. We're just policemen doing our duty, so we don't have no call to be bothered."

I grinned back at him. "And you don't have a call to be sarcastic, either. I play it straight with the Department—you damn well know that."

"Yeah," said O'Cassidy, "you do— *in the end*. We mostly have to use a helluva lot of patience on the way up, though."

"Uh-huh," I said. "It pays off, doesn't it? Here's an angle—the guy in the booth was using a .22 target pistol and had a big white nose shaped like an eggshell. He should be easy to find. Know a mug who looks like that?"

O'Cassidy shook his head. "I'll have a check-up made. Me, I don't know any guy with an egg for a nose. Maybe he's just moved in, or maybe he don't have no record. We'll find out."

I got my hat off the desk and walked to the door. I thought McNulty would have liked to stop me, but there wasn't a thing he could do about it.

"Let me know if you do," I said.

I rode the BMT subway express to Times Square and walked the rest of the way to my apartment. The little midtown square was quiet except that you could hear the Broadway traffic hum only a few blocks away. Bella, the switchboard girl who wants to be my secretary, wasn't around, so I went straight up in the elevator.

My apartment looked cool and orderly. The big windows were thrown open against the hot night. The table had a little vase of flowers on its center. The plain rust-colored carpet looked smooth and soft and worth the money I had had to pay to get it. There was whiskey and ice in the refrigerator. There was a jar of tobacco on the mantelpiece and three newly-cleaned pipes. There were two massive hide leather easy chairs. There was a wide davenport aslant the fireplace.

The fattest man in the world was in it.

Chapter III

HE ROLLED off the davenport as I came in and walked himself towards me on a couple of stout oaks clad in very fine worsted flannel. The fat of his neck rolled over and along his collar-line like a bicycle inner tube and he could count three chins. The bottom one sagged and spread in long folds so that his tie knot was something you had to take for granted. He would weigh around two hundred and forty pounds.

His skin was as white as polished wax. His pale gold hair was as soft and downy as a baby's. His eyes were cobalt blue and like no baby's you ever saw. His right hand engulfed the handle and part of the firing chamber of a .38 Smith and Wesson gun. He waved it at me hospitably.

"Take a seat," he invited. "Have a cigarette. Have anything you like—except the wrong ideas."

I lowered myself on to the arm of one of the chairs and took a second look at him. He might be any age from thirty-five to fifty-five. His teeth were small and white and even and they could be his own. If he shed the heater I could hit him in the mouth and find out. Uh-huh.

For the rest he was wearing a worsted flannel drape that was so pale gray it almost didn't have a color and a corded rayon shirt with button-down collar flaps and a wide salmon-pink tie. His feet, which were as elegant as a girl's, were thrust into a pair of those tan sandals they're trying to persuade men to wear these days. He looked

amazingly cool and relaxed and I thought he was probably the toughest character in New York at this moment.

When I had finished studying him I said: "Want a drink?"

"Yes indeed." His voice was deep and smooth and mellowed like a vintage port with a Philadelphia accent.

I jerked my head toward the kitchenette. He sighed.

"I shall have to follow you, my friend, with this vulgar weapon," he said. "The roscoe or persuader, as the old-style gangsters used to call it in the motion pictures of my youth." He gave a fat chuckle as though he was of the opinion that he had said something devastatingly funny.

I made the drinks and we sat down eyeing each other.

"Here's to you," I said. "What do they call you—the Thin Man?"

He loosed off another chuckle, but it got lost somewhere in the overlay and all I got was a breathy rustle from his puckered fat mouth.

"Roland," he said. "It's a nice elegant kind of name. Just call me Roland."

I took a slow drink and peeked at him over the rim of the glass.

"Okay, Roland," I said, "in what way can I brighten your life?"

He picked up his whiskey and drank it in one go, holding the S and W on his enormous thigh, one sausage-like finger pressing gently on the trigger so that the hammer lifted up fractionally. When he had finished his drink he put the glass on the floor and let the hammer go back softly into neutral.

"You do not scare easily, my friend," he said. "That is something I like about you, even though it may perhaps make my task a little more difficult."

I grinned at him. "Don't let my wisecracks fool you, Roland—most of the time I'm working I'm too scared to run and people are apt to get the wrong impression."

He leaned forward a little so that his third chin fanned out almost to his collar-bone.

"You called this evening on a Mrs. Thelma Farland," he said. "She wishes to engage you on a rather delicate mission. One which she cannot handle without outside aid—perhaps a private detective who can pull a few tricks for her. Check?"

I gave him a grunt and drank some more whiskey.

Fatmouth smiled cherubically. "You are cautious as well as courageous. Highly desirable attributes. . . ."

I pulled a cigarette out of a table box and lit it. I blew some smoke toward him. "Quit horsing around," I said, "and make me a proposition."

His hard blue eyes danced.

"Five thousand dollars," he said softly. "Five thousand dollars. Not in a banker's draft. In good solid folding-money and no receipt. Like it?"

"Yeah," I said. "I like five grand a whole lot better than the kind of money I usually latch on to."

He put a fat manicured hand to the floor and came up with a hogskin brief-case. He got it across his knees, pressed a little gold catch and opened the mouth of the case so that I could take a look inside.

The money was there all right. Five packages neatly held in brown paper bands. Five grand in C notes. Not too new-looking.

"What do I do to stash that away in my savings account?"

He flipped the catch back and put the case on the floor again.

"You forget you ever saw Mrs. Thelma Farland," he said. "Also you forget anything she may have told you. It is as simple as that, my friend."

I picked up the Scotch bottle, poured myself another shot and went into a one-man executive session with it.

When I came out I said: "Okay, Roland."

He stared at me out of the white wax moon he used for a face. His eyes had a queer look. He let his fat lips twist a little.

"I didn't think you'd be as easy as that," he sneered. "I suppose every man has his price if you bid him up enough. Private peepers more than most, no doubt."

"What about the dough?" I snarled.

He smiled contemptuously. "I will leave it in the briefcase," he said. "You may have the case as a present. I shall back out of the room and leave it for you."

I got off the chair.

"No you don't," I yelled. "I've been two-timed that way before. I got to see that dough. I got to see it really *is* dough."

He hesitated a moment. Then: "Very well—bend down and pick the case off the floor. Please be quick. There is a smell here I do not like."

I hung a new cigarette from my mouth and struck a match for it. Then I reached down for the case. I nicked one end of the lighted match into the open toe of his natty shoe and came back with the case, holding it in my lap and making a show of riffling through the notes.

When he let out his little yelp I slip sideways off the chair, hurling the case straight at his face. His .38 caliber went off with not much more than a loud thud, but the blow-back had hurt his hand and the hotfoot had hurt his little toe and what with one and the other he let the gun bounce onto the carpet.

I put my foot on it and jerked out my Luger.

"Now, Roland," I said, "let's have a real chat."

He eyed me without hate. "That was smart," he whispered. "Pulling an old trick like that. Giving me the hotfoot."

"You sold me the idea when you talked about those old-style movie gangsters," I said. "What was the name you didn't tell me."

He got his foot out of his shoe and massaged it tenderly. The tan sandal had a sooty burn on it about the size of a dime.

"Roland," he wheezed. "Roland, like I told you."

"Yeah," I told him, "I heard that part. What comes next?"

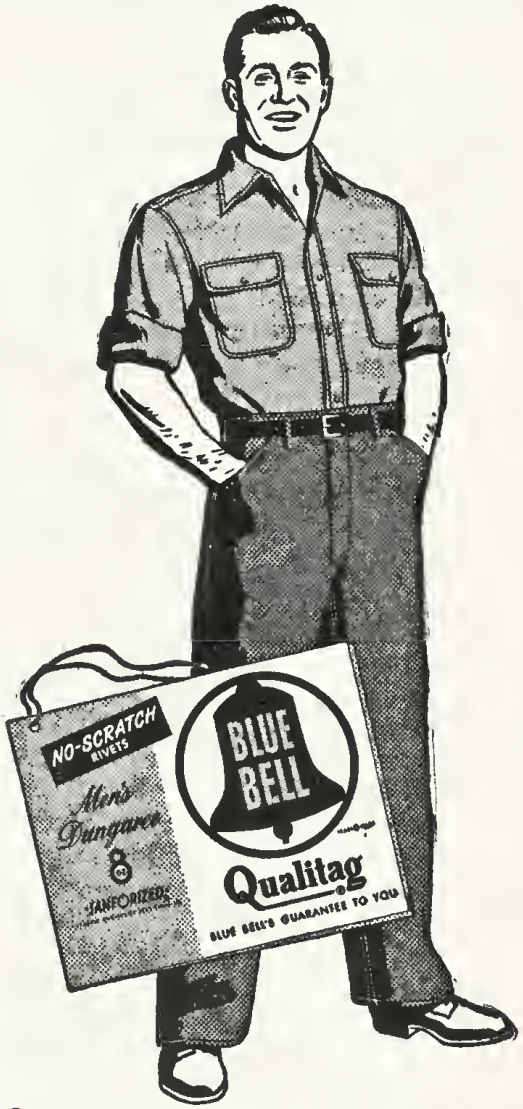
He stopped rubbing his sore toe and blinked at me amiably. He didn't speak.

"Stand still with your hands up," I said.

HE DID that, staring at me without any expression. I pushed the Luger hard into his fat belly and went through his pockets. What I got that mattered was an alligator wallet with a driver's license wedged in back of the roll. It was a Philadelphia license made out to Roland B. Perle, 2761

[*Turn page*]

How to buy better work clothes



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Marcy Boulevard, Germantown. That could make him almost Main Line. Uh-huh.

"They drink chlorinated sewage in Philly, don't they?" I jeered. "Must be fattening."

Fatmouth gave his lips a tiny quirk.

"Now you are cracking wise, my friend," he said. "You are also being cheap."

I thought he was right, but I didn't tell him. Instead, I said: "Why do you want me to forget about Mrs. Thelma Farland?"

He got his sandal back on to his foot and stood up, bringing the brief-case with him and letting it slap against his thigh.

"I have nothing to tell you, my friend," he said. "Good-night."

"Or about a loogan with an egg-shaped nose who hid in a phone booth and loosed-off a .22 target gun at me?" I said.

He stared at me with eyes that had as much expression as a day-old dead codfish.

"I have nothing to tell you, my friend," he said again.

Without batting an eyelid he showed me his back and started for the door. I let him get his hand on the knob, then called to him.

"Here's your gun—catch."

I flicked the safety-catch on and tossed it lightly across the room. He caught it easily, gave me a little bow and passed on out of the room. I could hear him waddling down the corridor until he came to the elevator shaft. I waited for the sound of the car coming up. I waited for him to get into it and ride down to street level.

Then I picked up the telephone book and leafed through the "B" section. I held the receiver against my shoulder while I lit another cigarette with one hand and spun the dial with the other.

It was a Skyline number and the penthouse was over on East End Avenue.

A man took the call. He had an English butler's accent.

"Roland Perle speaking," I wheezed. "Can you put me through."

"Why, yes sir." There was a click and another voice slid into my ear. A contralto voice with little husky overtones.

"Is everything . . . all right?"

"I've seen our friend," I said with a fat chuckle I hoped would register.

"Yes?" The word was a question-mark.

"Know Marty Alton's club in the Village?"

"Yes." The word was still a question-mark, but it was asking a different kind of question.

"Meet me there in half an hour—third booth down on the left," I wheezed and hung up. I thought I had taken enough chances.

I held the phone down on its cradle, then took it off again and dialed Marty's place. I wanted to make sure that little alcove table was free when she walked in. Whoever she was.

Then I stripped off my clothes and gave myself a shower. I changed into a crisply-laundered white shirt and got out my pinhead sharkskin. I folded a solid gray tie into a windsor knot, looked at my watch. It told me that twenty-five of the thirty minutes had gone. That meant I would arrive late enough for her to be there first.

I rode down in the elevator and tried not to catch Bella's gray eyes. I failed, which is the way it usually goes.

"Going out, Mr. Bogard?" she said brightly.

I walked over and leaned on the rails of her little corral. She was wearing her smooth white blouse and a dove-gray skirt with a maroon belt and her brown hair looked as though she had washed it earlier in the day. I mean it looked even better than usual.

"No," I told her, "I have just come in and I am about to listen to the Crosby show."

She gave a little laugh. "Well, it was a silly question, wasn't it? Like saying 'Isn't it wet?" when it's raining like mad."

"Uh-huh," I said. "It was just a way of putting your pretty nose into my business." I leaned a little over the fence. She didn't put her feet against the rails and push her chair backward like she used to do. I kissed the top of her head.

"I'll tell you all about it when I come in," I lied.

I was walking away when I thought of something and turned back.

"Did you see a fat man come out of the elevator sometime back?"

Her eyes gave a little dance. "Yes—was he a client?"

I rocked on the balls of my feet. "Did he say anything on the way out?"

"He wanted to use my phone," Bella reported.

"Did you let him?"

Bella said calmly: "I knew he had been to see you and I knew he wasn't pleased so I decided to make it difficult for him. I told him he'd have to use a pay phone."

I put one leg over the fence and cupped her face in my hands. I gave her a kiss full on the lips. They were soft, warm lips and they trembled a little.

"Why . . . why . . . Mr. Bogard . . ."

I swung back over the fence and headed for the main entrance. I had the odd feeling that if I stayed around I wouldn't want to go down to Marty Alton's club.

But I turned at the door and called softly: "One of these days, Bella, I shall have to do something about you."

I got my old Buick convertible at the garage and drove downtown. The traffic was the usual thing, but approaching Washington Square it thinned out enough for me to kill the motor outside Marty's exactly ten minutes late.

Moving straight in through the glass swing doors I collided with Marty Alton in person. He looked fit and tanned in his stocky blond way and about as relaxed as only a heathy man with a private fortune and no worries can look. He keeps his club open even in midsummer because he likes being in it.

"She is here and just a little impatient, I think," he said. He gave me a quizzical look. "You're certainly stepping high tonight, Dale," he added.

I knew what he meant when I walked down the three wide steps into the bar and saw her sitting at the alcove table swinging a sexy slipper and looking at her microscopic wrist-watch.

She was Lola Broekman. She was twenty-three years old. Casanova could have taken her correspondence course.

Chapter IV

I WALKED across the room and stood against the table looking down at her. She let her eyes travel insolently upward until they held mine. They were a smoky blue with wide irises and looked as if they were smoldering. Her face was heart-shaped and the skin would be just a little sallow without the matt surface which came out of a box. An expensive box.

In my old home town they would say she had sunrise hair, which is a way of saying hair has the color and sheen of lemon jello. She wore it as though she was trying to look like a well-known movie queen. I thought she broke rather more than even. She also wore a white strapless gown which let you know that her shoulders had just a hint of plumpness. The gown was cut so that you also knew she had breasts. They were the high-pointed kind that make some guys anxious to know whether the owner wears cuties. I wasn't anxious.

She took a gold-tipped cigarette out of a little flat gold case and put it between her small white teeth.

"This table is reserved," she said icily. "I am waiting for a friend."

"Roland Perle," I said. "A very fat number carrying a bag stuffed with five thousand pieces of moo."

She took the cigarette out of her scarlet mouth and tapped the unlit end on one of her silver-lake fingernails.

"He isn't coming," I footnoted. "Shall I sit down and say something?"

"About what?" Her eyes were still insolent, but now they were wary as well.

"Me, for instance."

The tiny flame of her lighter lived momentarily while she held her cigarette against it. She dragged on the cigarette the way a man does and let her next words come out mixed up with the smoke.

"Why you?"

"I'm Dale Bogard," I said.

"Is that supposed to be significant?" she said. But she didn't say it quite fast enough. She had had to take a couple of seconds to think that one out.

I grinned at her across the table.

"Significant enough for a man with a nose like an egg to fire a gun over my head," I went on. "Also for Mr. Roland Perle to offer me five thousand dollars to do nothing about something."

She leaned back with the cigarette in her mouth while she used both hands to smooth down the feminine contours. She probably thought they might come in useful and was drawing my attention to the fact of their existence. It wasn't necessary.

"What am I supposed to say to that, Mr. Bogard?" Her rustled-silk voice came at me pitched just above a whisper.

"The truth, possibly," I said. "Or is that asking too much?"

She gave a low laugh and blew her Turkish tobacco smoke into my face. I blew it back. Then she sent some more across, but I had lost interest now.

"Let's act grown-up," I said.

Miss Lola Broekman leaned both of her rounded elbows on the table and cupped her chin in her hands. The movement brought her face to within three inches of mine. She let me see her little white, wet teeth. She also let me see something in her eyes not usually observed outside of bedrooms.

"I should love that," she said. "Where shall we go to do our act?"

I took my face back another three inches and lit a cigarette I did that so my hands would have something to do other than wobble.

"I mean," I said carefully, "that we should quit playing little games with words and find out what goes."

"Again—such as what?"

"The gunman with the nose like an egg."

"I haven't the slightest idea what you imagine yourself to be talking about."

SHE said it with a perfectly calm, straight face. It could mask the simple truth or the calculated untruth. At that stage I wouldn't know.

"The fat boy with the load of dough, then."

She shrugged and gave a little yawn. I could see the red roof of her mouth.

Suddenly, she leaned farther across the table, both her forearms thrust out flat on its surface.

"You're cute," she said. "I like you."

"Uh-huh," I grunted.

"If you moved only an inch you could kiss me on the mouth and nobody would be any the wiser," she murmured. "I'm very nice to kiss."

"I'll bet you are," I growled. "A lot of guys must be going around with that particular memory."

She slid the boudoir out of her eyes. When she spoke her voice had the rustle without the silk.

"Goodbye, Mr. Bogard." She stood up as she said it, sweeping her baby mink fur piece off the long padded seat.

I got up, too.

"I think I'll be going as well," I told her. "I think I will have a little talk with the boys down on Centre Street." I flicked ash off the end of my cigarette. "Police Headquarters," I added.

She let her eyes give me a long hard look, but she sat down again. Slowly.

"You are a private detective, are you not, Mr. Bogard?" she said at last.

I didn't bother to answer. She knew that much about me. She probably knew a lot more. Probably my age, general habits and what color pajamas I went to bed in.

She tried another angle.

"Would you like to work for me?"

"Doing what?"

She put the flats of her hands on the polished table top and patted them up and down, holding the thumbs rigid while she did it.

"Finding out what Mrs. Farland is up to," she said.

I said: "You don't know much about the private detective business, do you, Miss Broekman?"

She let her scarlet mouth twist a little. She was trying to sneer at me and making a good job of it. "I imagine that private peepers are usually ready for anything—anything with more money in it." She said it in a voice you could strop a very blunt razor on.

"You don't think much of my trade?" I asked.

She pushed out her lower lip, brought it back again with a quick little movement. "I'll say this—you look a damn sight better than I imagined a private eye would look. I always imagined they were common little men with derby hats, halitosis and a watery right eye."

I grinned at her again. "From peeping through the keyholes of sleazy hotels where everybody signs the book as Mr. and Mrs. Smith?"

"You catch on fast," she said. "That was the general idea."

"Yeah," I said pleasantly, "the way I catch on to the fact that you are an over-sexed, over-monied, over-anxious brat with amoral instincts."

She stopped playing offbeats with her palms and balled both her elegant fists until the knuckles shone like little white rocks under her pink skin.

"No one talks to me like that," she whispered.

"Bogard does," I said.

She went on in a tense low voice: "Don't push that tough guy manner too far with me."

"And if I don't take your advice?"

MISS Lola Broekman picked up her bottom lip with her front canine tooth and bit into it for a moment. When she let go she said: "You'll find out."

She put the blond mink over her white shoulders.

"I don't think you're half as tough as you pretend," she said. "But I won't even take a phony tough manner."

"Okay," I said. "It's not worth talking about. Let's talk of something else. Such as why you are so interested in Mrs. Thelma Farland and at what point Mr. Roland Perle entered your life and why."

She dropped her eyelids a little, then squinted across at me through the slits. It didn't make her look more sexy than she already was but it made her look sexy in a different way.

"You're tangling with something you may find too hot to handle," she said. "I—"

"Yeah, I know," I said. "Now you're going to bring your daddy into it. James Caffrey Broekman, the well-known industrialist and a very tough proposition to meet up with."

She stood up, swaying a little like a nymph in a gentle breeze only there wasn't any breeze.

The rest of the analogy was right, though.

"Mr. Bogard . . . I've made you a perfectly genuine offer to do a little private investigating work for me. I am quite prepared to pay you generously. In money . . . or perhaps in a more agreeable way."

She looked me in the eyes as she said that, without moving one of her inch-long eyelashes or changing color by a sliderule fraction.

There was a long pause before I could get the words out.

"No sale," I said. It sounded like Bogard talking through an absorbent cotton pad.

"You'll be sorry," she said.

She stepped out from the table, then half-turned.

"Just one thing—did Roland give you my name and address?"

I wagged my head at her.

"I didn't imagine he would," she said. "How did you know we were connected in any way?"

"I catch on fast," I grinned.

[*Turn page*]

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I thought she was going to say something else, but she suddenly shrugged and started for the little stairway into the foyer. I stood there watching her do it. She couldn't walk across a club floor without a little sway. The kind that makes men stare with one sort of interest and their lady companions with another.

She went up the three carpeted steps as a tall, tanned guy with thick iron-gray hair came in. He was wearing a midnight blue tuxedo and a very big ring flashed little lights from the third finger of his left hand. They stood talking swiftly and the gray-haired man shot a sudden glance at me, then moved his eyes away.

Nothing else happened, because two seconds later they both went out through the glass swing doors onto the hot sidewalk.

I paid off the waiter and threaded my way across the room, and into Marty Alton's snazzy little office. I had just seen him go in.

"Hi, Dale—so she walked out on you?" Marty said it with his amused twinkle.

"I don't think she likes me," I said.

"So?"

"My manners are all loused-up," I told him. "Who was that gray-haired guy she went out with?"

Marty tapped a gold pencil against his teeth. He eyed me curiously.

"Leroy Kalda," he said. "A big time gambling operator. He has a very discreet place on Central Park West. Quite new."

I blew a little smoke at the ceiling. I didn't make it. I never do.

"James Caffrey Broekman would be perturbed," I said.

Marty looked at me without expression.

"I shouldn't try to rescue her, if I were you," he said slowly. "Not unless you take some good solid protection along with you."

I stared at him.

"The kind you wear under the arm, I mean," Marty said.

Chapter V

THE farmhouse was over in Jersey, up near the New York line. I headed out over the George Washington Bridge on a perfect morning. Perfect because now there was a gentle riffling breeze which sent the fleecy clouds bowling along in the blue.

I figured that well before nightfall I would be back in the Bowery moving along to Rivington with the good news for Mrs. Thelma Farland. It had happened that the first guy I ran into when I went along to the offices of the adoption outfit was a war veteran from the European theatre with whom I had seen some of the sights of England, so I didn't have to try too hard for the information I wanted. I had expected a little trouble, but my friend was willing to oblige, and half an hour later I walked out onto the street with the knowledge that a male child born on June 30, 1927, to Thelma Farland was adopted by George and Anna Huston, of Belmonte Farm, Linton, New Jersey. I was on my way there with the sun on my shoulder and hope in my heart. Just a routine job. Or it would have been but for Eggnose and the fattest man in the world and James Caffrey Broekman's nymphomaniac daughter.

Linton is one of those tiny straggling New Jersey communities you can drive through without knowing you've been there. Belmonte Farm was away over a gentle slope and I let the Buick drift down the highway between lush green fields and billowing trees. At the bottom of the slope I made an abrupt right-hand turn and coasted along a narrow farm road. Belmonte was at the end of the road. It wasn't a big place. Just a few acres by the look of it, but the frame house was large enough. Painted white with a green trim. The Hustons, if they still lived there, kept it nice. There was a wide driveway between two billiard-table lawns, and away to the left an apple orchard. You could smell the laden fruit as you went in.

I let the motor kill itself in front of the porch. There was an all-the-way-round verandah. There was an old rocking chair on the verandah, Kentucky style—but no Southern colonel drinking rock and rye and goddamning the Yankees. In fact, no one at all.

So I went up the four whitened steps and looked in through the big glass door into a wide cool hall. There was a bell button. I

leaned on it meditatively, whistling a few bars of *After You've Gone* to blend with the mellow chimes within.

Footsteps came from deep in the house and a man moved into the hall. I took my elbow off the bell, took my hat off my head and waited for him to open up.

When he did that I could see he was maybe fifty-odd years old, balding on top but not markedly because he had the kind of crisp wiry hair that grays without thinning overmuch. He had a long, lined and tanned face, pale eyebrows, strong frontal teeth stained a little with nicotine and large sad brown eyes and flag-ears. The combination made him look something like a mournful spaniel.

He got the glass doors open and said Yes, what did I want?

I said: "My name is Dale Bogard. I am looking for Mr. George Huston."

The sad eyes looked at me without expression.

"I am George Huston," he said at last. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"You could introduce me to your son," I said succinctly.

Now there was expression in his eyes. The kind of expression you catch when a man suddenly looks back to something long ago, something best not remembered too well. But I could be wrong.

He didn't speak at first. He just stood there with that look on his face and a little pallor showing under the sun-tint of his skin.

Then, suddenly, he turned his head and shouted over his shoulder: "Anna . . . Anna . . ." He didn't take his gnarled hand off the door handle.

A SHORT, plumpish woman hurried into the hall, stood beside him. Her hair was thick and slightly wavy and quite white. Perhaps as little as a decade ago she had been physically attractive in a mildly buxom way. She still had looks, but her skin was etched with a multiple tracery of fine wrinkles and her eyes had the same sad, long-gone look I had seen in her husband's.

"What is it, George?" She asked the question in a gentle, almost musical voice.

He crooked his free arm around her shoulders. I could see his long fingers press affectionately into the plump flesh under her gingham frock.

"This gentleman is a Mr. Bogard. He wishes to speak to us about . . . about our boy."

Her eyes misted, but she said quite steadily: "Please ask the gentleman to come in, George."

He nodded his head briefly and they stood aside together so that I could step into their house. Then, without a word, Anna Huston led the way across the hall into a wide living room furnished in Early American. There was a rather handsome radio in one corner, several cosy-looking chairs. It was a pleasant, relaxed room. It was the kind of room I would like to live in for a few months of the year and work at a typewriter near the big bay window with its view of quiet country. Belmonte Farm itself wasn't big. I could see that. But the Hustons were far from poor.

They sat together on one of the chairs, she on the chair itself and her husband on the arm, still holding her gently to him. Suddenly, they looked old and tired and strangely pathetic.

I sat on one of the other chairs and said softly: "I am a private investigator from New York. I am making inquiries for a Mrs. Thelma Farland, who—"

Anna Huston bit her lip on a tiny sound struggling in her throat. George Huston just sat there, a strained expression on his face and no movement in his eyes.

"You adopted her illegitemate son twenty-five years ago," I said. "That is correct, isn't it?"

They nodded in unison, neither trying to speak.

"Mrs. Farland has no claim to her son, neither does she seek to establish such a claim."

Anna Huston folded her hands in her lap, clenching and unclenching her smallish hands. "Then why . . . why is she reopening something that happened so long ago? Tell us that, Mr. Bogard."

I got out a pipe and absently stuffed Prince Albert into it.

"She wishes to know that her son is alive and well and would like to see him once

before she dies. It is as simple as that."

George Huston got up from the chair arm and began nervously pacing the rug. When he quit doing that he wheeled on me and exclaimed: "How can this . . . this woman hope to see the son she parted with twenty-five years ago . . . even if that were possible?"

"He needn't know she is his mother," I said soberly. "She just wishes to see him. An elderly woman's last wish, if you like to be theatrical about it." I put a flame to my pipe and drew in some smoke. "She is a very lonely woman," I said.

He stood quite still, with his long arms hanging at his sides, his wrist-knuckles showing bonily beneath his coat sleeves. He turned his head slowly toward his wife, met her eyes. Neither spoke, but each understood what the other was thinking. I didn't have an angle—except his last remark.

I took it from there.

"What did you mean—about if it were possible?"

HUSTON passed one hand wearily across his tired face. When he answered his voice was a dry whisper, like dead leaves rustled along an empty sidewalk.

"Our boy . . . died," he said.

He put out a long arm to touch his wife.

"It was long ago," she said. "So long ago. We—we haven't gotten over it."

I said: "I'm sorry. When did it happen?"

Anna Huston buried her face in her hands and sobbed very quietly to herself. Her husband moved swiftly to her side, cradling her shoulders in his long arm. His eyes looked at me with smoldering hate.

"In God's name, why do you have to torment us?" he whispered. "Haven't we suffered enough?"

I stood up, pushing my pipe back into my pocket.

"I told you I'm sorry to reawaken memories," I said, "but it can't hurt you now to tell me."

"He died when he was only six," he said brokenly. "We—we loved him very dearly—we . . ."

But I wasn't listening as his voice trailed away. I was looking past him to the side-door which led into the corridor connecting the hall with the kitchen. I was looking at it because a girl had stepped through and was standing there framed in the doorway. She was about twenty-seven years old and not less than five feet nine in her wedge shoes. She wore a gray woolen skirt with tiny crisp checks and a white linen blouse with a wide cutaway collar. She also wore ash-blonde hair sloping carelessly onto her shoulders and her clear level eyes were amber-flecked. She had the kind of nautral loveliness which would still be there first thing in the morning.

She had a double-barreled shotgun in her hands. She was pointing it at a spot three inches above my belt.

"Get out!" she said. I didn't like the words, but I liked the voice. It was a voice to hear again, but not in this setup.

Anna Huston jumped up from her chair and ran across the room. "Oh, Cathy. Please make him go."

The girl let a little smile quirk the corners of her mouth. "He'll go all right—if he knows what's good for him," she said coolly.

I rocked on my heels.

"I'm here on a peaceful mission," I told her. "I'm not working a heist or trying to set the old farmstead on fire. I—"

The girl flashed a contemptuous look at me and I don't like being treated with contempt. Especially by beautiful girls with ash-blonde hair and old brown shotguns.

"I don't know what you've come about, though I can make a guess," she said. "I promised Anna and George that the next time any city slicker tried to bother them I'd clear him off the premises with or without a load of buckshot in his breeches."

I grinned at her, but it didn't help any. I hadn't supposed it would help.

She came on into the room, still pointing the barrel at me. It wobbled the way the Paramount tower does when a gentle zephyr blows along Broadway.

"You're on your way, Mister Whoever-you-are."

"Bogard," I told her. "Dale Bogard."

"Out, Mr. Dale Bogard. Make it fast now."

I GOT my hat off the chair and walked backward toward the door. Bogard being given the heavho by a dame. But a shotgun fired by a dame hurts just the same as a shotgun fired by a guy. I didn't have a doubt that she would fire it if she thought she had to do that.

"I'm a private eye trying to trace the illegitimate son of a client," I said as I went. "The son was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. George Huston. Seems he died. Why do you all have to get steamed-up?"

She stopped for a moment, looking at me.

"You wouldn't understand, would you?" she said in a low voice. "No, damn you, you wouldn't understand that you're using a clumsy instrument to pry open the memories of an old couple who loved a child and lost him."

I shrugged. "Okay. What's your name?"

"Cathy Marton." She said it automatically the way people sometimes answer when you suddenly ask them an irrelevant question. She flushed as she said it.

"I suppose you think that's smart?" she said. "You would."

"Not very," I told her. "I just like to know the names of people who stick me up with a gun."

She stopped curling her lip. "If you want to know it, I hapepn to be very fond of Mr. and Mrs. Huston. I stay here most summers. I write books."

"Me too," I said.

She looked at me without much interest.

"I know your name now," she said. "I've seen your books. I've never read them. They seem to be full of guns and women."

"You don't think much of that kind of book?"

She shrugged.

"You should talk," I said. "You're carrying a gun this very minute and you're a woman. Not bad-looking, either."

She sank a tooth into her bottom lip. When she unhooked it she said: "I said to be on your way, Mr. Dale Bogard. Now—get going. There's too many of your kind around."

"Huh?"

"You're the second man to come snooping around here troubling George and Anna—and I damn well won't have them troubled any more."

I stopped going backward.

"When was this?" I asked her.

"Yesterday afternoon."

"What kind of a guy?"

She tried to sneer then, but she wasn't very good at it. She never was going to be very good at it.

"This one didn't even give a name," she said tightly.

"You see him? What was he like?"

She shook her head. "I wasn't around."

George Huston said heavily: "He was a middle-aged man. Maybe fifty. Tall. A city type. Very prosperous-looking. Very well-dressed. He had a lot of thick iron-gray hair."

I stepped backward on to the verandah.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks for telling me that. Goodbye, Cathy—though I hope it isn't."

Then I went down the steps and slid in behind the wheel of my old convertible. I swung it round in a wide arc and moved off down the crunchy driveway. I turned my head once. Cathy Marton was standing motionless and alone on the porch. She kept the gun on me until I disappeared from her vision.

Chapter VI

I GOT back to my office along about mid-afternoon. I left the Buick on a lot and rode up in the little elevator. There was nothing in the mail-box and no clients fretting in the tiny reception room. I walked on through it into the office and blew the thin dust off the top of the table. Then I got myself into the big chair I use for interviewing prospects. I slid open one of the long drawers and started pulling out a pint bottle of Canadian Club.

I had it halfway out when I caught Thomas Jefferson giving me a hard look out of the slightly faded oil painting on the opposite wall and I let the pint slide back.

The ornate picture was left on the wall by a previous tenant and I keep it because Tom gives me those hard looks every time I get the idea of taking a drink when I shouldn't,

which is often. The way things are going the old boy will have saved me a load of bucks by the year's end.

I sat on for another few minutes drawing circles in the dust with my index finger. Then I looked at my wrist watch and saw it was four-fifteen. I jerked the phone off its cradle and got a call through to the Lansdon Apartments.

It was a party-line, but I had the feeling that it would be better to speak to Mrs. Thelma Farland on the phone than to go down there in person. Eggnose might be around again and maybe next time he wouldn't shoot to miss.

Then her voice came over the phone. Low and musical.

I said: "This is Bogard, the private detective you hired to find your son."

"Yes?" The short word was long enough to rise expectantly.

"I traced the family who adopted him. They are George and Anna Huston and they live at Belmonte Farm on the fringe of a little place called Linton, New Jersey."

"Did . . . did you—" She didn't finish the sentence. She didn't have to.

I got a Lucky into my mouth and scratched a match on the heel of my shoe. I dragged on the smoke and let it out as I spoke. It was something I wasn't especially anxious to say, but I had to tell her.

I said, speaking very slowly and carefully: "The Hustons say the boy was a very fine lad. They say they loved him very dearly. They were all broken up because he died when he was only six years old, they told me."

There was no sound over the phone. I flattened the receiver against my left ear until it hurt. Then, faintly, her voice came back. There was no music in it now. Just a dry, brittle tone that she used to cover up pain.

"Oh—oh . . . I . . ."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm very, very sorry. I had to tell you what they said to me."

"Yes, yes—of course. I understand, Mr. Bogard. I—" There was a little pause. Then: "Why do you emphasise that they *told* you?"

"I had no way of checking on what they said."

Her voice fluttered a little. "What . . . why, don't you think they were telling the truth? Oh! if that is so, I—"

I cut in on her then. "Don't build false hopes; I can't promise anything. I just have a feeling that everything in this case is screwy."

I hesitated a moment, then decided. I told her about the egg-nosed gunman and Miss Lola Broekman and the fat guy.

SHE listened without saying a word until I had finished. Then she asked: "Do you think the Hustons are dishonest, lying about something, Mr. Bogard?"

"I took them to be sincere and decent people," I said soberly. "But even sincere and decent people sometimes have a reason for not being quite on the level. I think it may be like that in this case. Do you want me to go ahead with it?"

She answered simply: "Yes."

I thought for a moment. "Look, Mrs. Farland, I don't want you to worry about the money angle. I work for other people's dough, but sometimes I work for free just because it happens to suit me. Queer things are breaking in this case and I'm a guy who likes to know what makes a case go queer on me. What I'm trying to say is that I'll be staying on it to satisfy my own curiosity. If I dig anything that fits in with what you want we'll see about payments later. Maybe there won't be any payment."

Her slow even voice said: "I got you into this, Mr. Bogard. I shall consider it a point of honor to meet the bill."

"I'll make it out on a very small sheet of paper," I cracked.

She laughed a little then. A nice easy laugh despite the slight tremor at the end, as if she had remembered something.

"You will keep in touch with me, please?" she said.

I told her I would and dropped the receiver back on its rest. I waited a moment, then called the operator and gave a Philadelphia number. There was a delay on long-distance and I sat staring at Tom Jefferson. Finally, I got up, walked over to the por-

trait and hung a typewriter cover over it. Then I went back to my desk and hauled out the Canadian Club and a glass. The hell with Jefferson.

The call came through after I had taken one rather fast and was starting another rather more slowly.

"Hi, Timmy," I said. "This is Bogard. Remember me?"

Tim Caldon is a Philly newspaperman. When I was a tab leg man in New York

"I'd like to ask you a few questions about certain nights just to keep the judge's interest up"

the city editor once sent me down to Quakertown because he was playing a hunch that there was a story in back of the killing of a trolley-car motorman who was found riddled with bullets near the embryo subway on Locust Street. The hunch was a phony, but it was a pleasant enough trip, largely because I went around with Tim Caldon.

He said now: "Nice to hear you, Dale. I see you've quit newspapers for fiction. Doing fine?

I told him I was doing fine. Everybody who writes books says he's doing fine.

"What do you want to know, Dale?" I could catch the curiosity in Timmy's voice.

"All about a very fat Philadelphian who calls himself Roland Perle."

CALDON let out a thin breathy whistle. "What d'you mean—*calls himself* Roland Perle? That's his name all right—and it's quite a name around these parts."

I blew some smoke into the telephone. It didn't make him cough that I noticed.

"Yeah," I said, "I know his name is Roland Perle. I shouldn't have phrased it that way. I mean, what's the dope on him?"

"Just what do you want me to tell you?"

"What he does for his dough, what sort of life he lives, the kind of people he runs around with and why he goes around rodded-up."

Timmy whistled again. "I didn't know he packed artillery. But, answering the rest of your question, Perle belongs to one of the old Main Line families. They lost most of their dough, which is tough on Roland on account of he likes to act the big time playboy. He doesn't run around with hoods, but he's been in one or two shady political deals and he does plenty of gambling. A lot of it seems to pay off. He also has a peculiar fascination for some women, despite his fat. Especially women with bankrolls thick enough to choke a horse. That help?"

"Yeah," I breathed at him. "Yeah—that helps all right."

"What's our Roland doing in that overcrowded clip joint you call New York?"

I let the ancient crack drift with the tide. I told him: "When last seen by me he was waving five grand at me in behalf of an unnamed client whose identity I guessed by a piece of fast Bogard thinking. He was also waving a long-thirty-eight at me. I took that from him in case it went off. I'll be seeing you."

"Hey—wait a minute. I haven't finished yet—"

"I have," I said pleasantly. "I'll call you up and tell all in a day or two."

I let the receiver rap down smartly and reached for the whiskey. But I didn't quite make it. This was because I could see the door swinging open slowly, the way it would if someone had walked very carefully across

my reception room trying not to make a noise.

Then it swung wide open and a tall boy in his mid-twenties stepped in. He didn't have a gun, so I let my right hand slide away from my coat and pick up the whiskey.

He came on into the room, not saying anything, and stood on the other side of the table looking down at me. There were six feet of him draped in hand-woven Finchley sport clothes. The jacket was a slate-gray herringbone and the flannel trousers were dark and soft and fine. He had a heavy-weave white shirt and a royal blue tie with silver stripes making the downgrade. He put the flats of his hands on my table and bent a little.

"So you're what a private dick looks like," he sneered.

There didn't seem to be anything in that for me, so I passed the time taking a second look at his face. It was a long face, good-looking in the stylized collegiate manner but some of the youth had gone with living too fast. The eyes were clouded because he didn't catch up on enough sleep and the lids were a little puffed and heavy for a boy. He had high cheekbones and a pointed chinline. It was an insolent, dissolute face that would age twenty years in the next ten. I had never seen it before.

"You insulted my sister," he said. "A gentleman doesn't allow his sister to be insulted."

I sneered back at him. "Which gentleman?" It was a sub-Bogard crack. It had to be if this moron was to understand it.

He understood it. A slow flush spread across the pallor of his face and he took one hand off the table to make a balled fist. I didn't bother to look at it. His eyes would tell me if he was going to try an all-the-way-up swing. He wasn't ready to try one. He hadn't had enough to drink and I hadn't goaded him enough.

"I'm Larry Broekman," he said in a voice meant to be tough the way a gentleman thinks he can sound tough. "My kid sister came to see you—at your request. She didn't like your type. D'you hear that, Mister Peeper?"

"Yeah," I said wearily. "Run along, will you?"

He bent a little more so that a lock of his blue-black hair slipped down one side of his forehead. A little flicker came and went in his clouded hazel eyes.

"I'll go when I'm ready," he snarled.

"Look," I said, "I'm working on a case. Your sister also wants to put me on a case. I don't want to work for your sister. I told her that. Did she tell it to you that way when she sent you here?"

He shut his pale lips in a long line, opened them.

"My sister didn't send me," he said. "She referred to what happened when she met you, that's all. That was enough for a gentleman—"

I grinned at him. "Don't keep plugging that gentleman line. You have to do something more than wear a Harvard accent to be a gentleman. Or didn't they teach you that?"

TWO spots of color glowed suddenly on the tight skin over his high cheekbones. He brought his balled fist up from his side, making it swing across and down a little to give it to me on the point of the jaw. I had goaded him enough. But I had also seen the swing before it started because I hadn't stopped watching his eyes.

I caught his wrist as he drove his blow across the table, turned it sharply so that he let out a quick cry as the pain sped up his forearm. I kept on turning his wrist, forcing it down until his arm was flat on the table top. Then, suddenly, I let go and brought my other hand up to smack him heavily across the side of his face.

He staggered backward over the room, landing against the wall. The impact dislodged the tpewriter cover which floated down and settled on top of his nicely slicked hair. I though Tom Jefferson looked mildly amused.

I came out from behind the table as Larry Broekman got the cover off and jumped at me. He shouldn't have done that because I put my fist out as he came and he stopped it with his chin. It wasn't a hard sock, but it was hard enough to send him back against

the wall. The base of his skull hit the fading wallpaper and he rode gracefully down the wall until his elegant bottom hit the baseboard and his long legs went out V-shaped on the carpet.

His eyes looked at me madly so I reached down and brought him up on a half-nelson.

"Next time you want to sock a guy in the pan don't signal your intentions with your eyes," I said.

He worked his mouth, but he didn't get any words out.

"I know what you feel like," I said. "I'd feel the same way—but I didn't ask you to come calling on me with violent ideas in mind."

I reached out with my free hand and got the door open. I shoved him through it and let go his arm.

"Next time you want to play Sir Galahad get the facts right first," I said as I slammed the door on him.

I stood there for a moment. Then I heard the reception door bang on him and footsteps going down the corridor. I sighed and went back to the Canadian Club. This time I figured that even Jefferson wouldn't mind.

But this wasn't my lucky day. The telephone clamored.

I leaned over the table for it, staying there with the receiver held against my left ear by the arch of my shoulder. A voice I had never heard before purred over the wire.

"Is this Dale Bogard?"

I said it was.

The voice went on: "I am a friend of Thelma Farland. She'd like to see you. But she feels it would be better for you not to come to her place again."

The voice was smooth, educated—and deliberately neutral. Or trying to be. I felt my mouth grin cynically.

I asked: "Where does Mrs. Farland want to see me?"

The smooth voice went on: "Close to the Ninety-sixth Street entrance to Central Park. You turn right, walk a little way. You will see three tall bushes . . ."

I told him okay.

"Then you will be there?" The voice had no rising note of expectancy. It was pitched normally. It could be genuine.

"Yeah," I told him, "I'll be there. Will you?" I shot the last two words down the mouthpiece.

A brief sound slid into my ear. Like a slight sigh of regret. "I am afraid not. It has really nothing to do with me. I am just conveying Mrs. Farland's message."

"I see. Any idea what she wants to see me about."

"None—except that it is a matter of importance and, I gather, delicacy. That is why she wants to see you away from her apartment."

"Goodbye," I said and clicked the receiver back on its cradle.

I stood up with the whiskey in my hand. I drank it slowly, set the glass down on the table. Every word he had said could be true and every word could be untrue. Maybe there was an easy way to find out. Like calling-up Thelma Farland. I dialed her apartment. She wasn't in. I shrugged, gave myself another slug of whiskey, washed my hands and face, combed my hair and broke open my Luger to see that all the moving parts still moved.

I locked the door into my private office, went out through the reception room, down the corridor and into the elevator. I was on my way to see Mrs. Thelma Farland in Central Park or maybe a man who wore an egg for a nose.

Either way I wasn't bothered.

FIVE-THIRTY, the voice had said. I walked all the way because I had the time and driving a car in this city never rates anything less than hard work. I headed uptown along Columbus Avenue, making a right-hand turn into Ninety-sixth and walking down to the gates. There were a few people about as I went in. When I got near the bushes there wasn't anyone around.

Then I saw a little movement at the far end of the bushes. I slid my right hand inside my jacket and got the safety-catch off the Luger. I didn't stop walking. The bushes didn't stop moving. When I was quite close to the bushes Eggnose stepped out. He didn't have a gun. He didn't have to.

I understood why when I heard a fast, tiny noise behind me. I didn't have time to

understand anything else because the lumpy sod floor of Central Park came up and hit me in the face.

Chapter VII

I WOKE up with that old brakeman's cleaning-rag in my mouth. It had been there before—but with some excuse. This time I hadn't any. I had walked into the park thinking what a smart operator Dale Bogard was and I had turned out to be just another fall guy. Fall was right. I could still taste grass from where my mouth had hit the turf after the guy I hadn't seen had sapped me.

That corny two-man play. Hell, Bogard, maybe you should quit trying to be a private eye. I wondered how they had got me out of the park into their car without raising inquiring eyebrows. As if it mattered. . . .

My pupils felt like hot points and I had the kind of headache which keeps lifting the top of your skull and letting it slam down like a desk flap. A crazy mosaic of colored lights weaved about in front of my eyes, so I shut them and tried not to move for a while. I had to do it several times before I got rid of the mosaic.

There was a bruise on the nape of my neck which extended up the back of my skull for maybe three inches, but I knew it wasn't serious. I put my hand there and brought it away with very little blood on it. The man who had sapped me had done an expert job. Just hard enough to put me out, not hard enough to do any real injury.

There had to be a reason for that. It would be close at hand. I knew that. So I let my eyes prowl the room. It was a room in the shadows, though it still wasn't dark outside. Daylight shone faintly through the drawn window drapes. It showed me a bare, dirty room. The wallpaper was split and peeling. The floor had the kind of fluff on it that accumulates in a room nobody uses or cleans. There was an old-fashioned iron bedstead in the corner, a cracked wash-bowl, a broken chair.

I got on to my hands and knees, then finally on to my feet. I stepped carefully across the room to the bed and stared down at him. He was lying on his back with his head on the frowsy pillow. There was blood on the pillow, but not much because he had been shot before they brought him into the room. The back of his head was pulped and some of his brains sagged out. But he was still quite recognizable from the front. They hadn't shot away his egg-shaped nose.

His jacket gaped and his tie was twisted away from his unfastened collar button. One of his legs dangled off the bed. Already a little stiffly. I put a hand down and touched him. He wasn't completely cold, but he soon would be.

I stood staring down at him for maybe a minute.

"So long, pal." I heard a voice say it and I knew it was my voice in spite of the croak. I put out a hand to hold on to the brass knob on the head-rail of the bed. I felt a little sick.

Then I slid a hand inside his breast pocket. He had a large wallet stuffed with the usual junk. Old letters, stamps, a driving license issued in Illinois and a snapshot of a girl with very dark hair and a full sensuous mouth. The letters were all addressed to L. Rizola, in care of the Alford Hotel, Lenton Avenue. That was a little street between Park Place and Fulton full of rooming-houses and rundown hotels. There were three letters and I opened one after another, swiftly. In each case the contents was gone. Only the addressed envelopes remained.

Eggnose had a moneyclip packed with bills. They hadn't taken *that* off him. He also had a key in the pocket of his coat. A hotel key, tabbed with Number Eleven. I slipped it into my pants pocket and stood up.

THAT was when my left foot touched something hard and metallic on the floor. I reached down and brought it up, turning it around in my hand as if it was something new and it wasn't. It was my Luger pistol.

I sniffed at the muzzle and knew it had been fired not very long ago. I hadn't fired it. I broke the gun and counted the shells. One was missing. That would be the one which had blown some of his brains out. An artistic touch. My gun. Wearing my prints. If I wiped them off it wouldn't make any difference. It was still my gun and the Po-

lice Department knew I had a Luger because I carried it with their permission.

I stopped feeling sick and seeing lights and having a headache. Maybe I still had them but I wasn't aware of it any more. I had something else to worry about now. Eggnose had taken a shot at me and made his getaway and now I was in a house with his body and his body had a bullet in it out of my gun. There would be a helluva lot of explaining to do if the Homicide boys walked in.

But they wouldn't be walking in unless they were given the tipoff. . . .

I knew they had been given that when I heard the siren wailing down on the street. I jumped across the room to the door. It was locked. The shrill of the siren grew louder, then died. I could hear the prowl car pull in out front of the house far below. I slid the Luger back in my underarm clip, jerked the drapes apart and put a foot straight through the window. There was a narrow verandah and a fire escape.

The verandah linked with the iron steps just a little way beyond the window. I stepped through the smashed glass, paused to reach in and pull the drapes back into position and padded along the walk to the steps. I went down them carefully, on tiptoe, passing several windows without lights and one with them. I ducked for the next five steps down and took the last twenty-seven at a slightly faster tempo.

I finished in a narrow alley which ran down the back of the block, then turned left onto the sidewalk. I came out on the street about a couple of dozen yards from the police jalopy, walking casually and pausing to light a cigarette with hands which did their best not to shake. But I knew that to break into a run was to invite a shot and the chances were that the boys wouldn't miss.

As I went on down the darkening street I could hear McNulty yelling to someone to open up. I didn't think there would be anyone at home to answer him.

I DODGED into my apartment so that I didn't have to see Bella who would want to know what-the-hell and I didn't want to tell her. I doctored the back of my head from the medicine cabinet I keep in my pint-sized bathroom, took a shower, changed my clothes and walked back into my lounge with a new bottle of Sir John Schenley and a lager glass. I needed both.

Halfway through the whiskey I got the Alford Hotel key out and thought about it.

I also thought about the Luger. Enough to take it apart, get rid of the remaining shells, clean and oil the mechanism, feed a new clip in and let it slide back into my holster.

Then I drank the rest of the whiskey in the lager glass, got my hat and a light coat and went out of the apartment house the way I had got in—without talking with Bella. I walked down to Times Square and rode the Seventh Avenue subway express to Hudson-Chambers.

It was only a five-minute walk to Lenton Avenue. I hadn't been there before and I knew I hadn't missed out on anything because I have a good sense of smell and boiled New England dinner has a powerful carrying effect on a hot summer night.

The Alford was halfway down the little street. It was a shabby buff-fronted hotel with a wide door which somebody had painted green around the time Daddy Browning was being photographed with his arm round Peaches. I mean you had to look pretty damned hard to know it ever was green.

Four worn stone steps led the way in. The reception desk was on the left of the dark, stuffy foyer—if you could call it that. A single naked electric light glared down on to the balding head of a scrawny middle-aged guy with a complexion like soiled blotting paper. He also had two of his front teeth missing and his chin rested on the top of a Hoover collar into which had been threaded what looked at first sight like a black shoestring. But it could be a tie.

"Full up. Ain't got no room in the place." His voice sounded like a fiddle-player double stopping on the wrong strings.

I walked closer and leaned against the desk. He reached down, came up with a pair of steel spectacles held together at one side with wound black thread.

When he got me into focus he blew his underlip out, then sucked it back in with a faint whistling sound. He did it a couple more times before he spoke again.

"Don't look like you would want a room here," he said carefully. He kept his pinky eyes on me as he said it.

"I want to see Mister Rizola," I told him. "Room Eleven."

He yanked at a battered telephone. I got a five out of my billfold and folded it lengthwise, tapping one end on my left thumbnail. He stopped yanking at the phone and rested his elbows on the desk top. Then he put one hand down and delicately took the note, unfolding it and holding it up against the glare of the light.

Finally, he slid it into his vest-pocket and began leafing through the register.

"I ain't seen you," he said without looking up.

I took a step away from the desk. His voice called after me, very low. "His pal's in."

I went back.

"What pal?"

"He shares the room with another fellow—a guy who calls himself Lenny Meisel." He spelled out the name so that I knew he had mispronounced it.

"Buddies—or room mates because they have to be?"

He raised his eyes briefly. There was a funny look in them.

"Buddies, I guess," he said thinly. Then he dropped his head again.

I WALKED up the wafer-thin staircarpet, down the second floor corridor. Number Eleven was halfway down on the left. The door was ajar by about an inch. I pushed it wide open with my toe and waited a moment. Nothing happened. I walked on in. There was a lighted lamp on a small pine-wood table, an iron double-bed, an old-fashioned highboy, two straightbacked chairs and a low wicker lounging chair if anyone was fool enough to lounge in it.

Nothing happened again. Nobody came at me with a gun. The room was as still as a morgue except for the tiny breeze which lifted the ends of the flimsy lace curtains against the single small window.

I reached behind me and snapped the center light on. That was when I saw his feet. They wore brilliant white sox and no shoes. They stuck out fractionally from under the bed.

I stepped across the room and got hold of his ankles. The rest of him slid out from under the bed quite easily because he was only a little guy and hadn't carried much weight around during his short life.

He was very dead now. This was because someone had looped a coil of wire round his neck on the ends of a thick wooden peg. Then the peg had been turned. It had been turned many times so that the copper wire bit into his Adam's apple and forced his tongue out halfway down his soiled shirt. His eyes were wide open as they had stared in his last writhing agony and his skin was purpled all round the mouth.

Not a nice way to die. For the second time in hours I started to get sick to my stomach. I jerked his handkerchief out of his breast-pocket and spread it down over his face. It was the face of a boy maybe twenty-three or twenty-five. He wore the kind of clothes that pass for style in pool-rooms and taxi dancehalls. There were two dirty pictures in his inside pocket, a Mauser pistol in a natty little clip under his left armpit—the gun he hadn't been able to draw when someone threw the wire loop over his head. He also had a thonged blackjack in a sheath. I pulled it out, stared at it. I thought it could be the sap I had connected with up in Central Park.

I wiped the blackjack off, slid it back in the sheath. There was something else. I could see it in the breast-pocket from which I had jerked his fancy handkerchief. Something white. It was one of several small envelopes.

When I opened the first a fine white powder slid out into my palm. Heroin. I felt my mouth twist a little. I understood why the desk clerk's eyes had that funny look.

I wiped off everything else in the room I could remember having touched and some things I knew I hadn't touched. I put the center light out and went carefully down the faded staircarpet and back into the foyer.

The clerk didn't even look up.

But I moved over and stood close in, looking down.

"You're going to have to use that phone after all," I said.

He let his queer eyes flicker up then.

"Why?"

I jerked my head toward the stairway.

"On account of the junky," I said.

His chin bobbed up and down on his Hoover collar.

"Why—he—he isn't—he ain't. . . ."

"Yeah," I said grimly, "he is. You'd better call some law."

Panic looked out of his eyes now. More panic than there should be. Something clicked in my mind.

I said softly: "Anyone else been here tonight asking for him?"

He didn't tell me. He didn't have to. Suddenly, I swept a hand down and dived it into the vest pocket he had used to stash away the five-spot. I came out with a folded ten.

"Who gave it to you?" I snarled at him.

"A—a—guy,"

I got hold of his shoestring tie and jerked his face upward and toward me.

"Give. What kind of a guy?"

His pupils dilated against the mottled white of his eyeballs.

"A big guy in a long slicker. Wore heavy hornrimmed cheaters. Dark brown hair, longish. Very flat lookin' hair."

I let him go then. I didn't know anyone who looked like that.

"For a ten you let a killer in," I said. "That'll look good to the Homicide boys when they stand you under the lights down on Centre Street. But maybe you won't tell them about that," I added slowly.

His frightened eyes stared up at me in agony.

"Maybe I wasn't here, either," I said.

Another look came and went on his face.

"I ain't never seen you, mister," he whispered.

I spread his money down on the desk top and walked on out into the night.

Chapter VIII

I HADN'T been in Chicago since I was in my teens, which was around the time Mayor Thompson was saying nasty things about the English. Colonel Bertie McCormick was saying them now, so the old place hadn't changed too much in that respect. But it had in others. The Prohibition era had gone and the old-style gangsters with it. Johnny Torrio and Alphonse Capone were dim names today and hoodlums no longer rode in procession past the Hawthorne Hotel methodically raking that impressive façade with sub machine-gun fire. There was still plenty of crime and more than a fair quota of violence in a country which has too much of it anyway, but it would be under cover now.

But the Windy City still had its winds, even on a day like this in the high summer. They blew in off the Great Lakes, riffling down the boulevards, lifting the skirts of the slick chicks and lighting up the jaded eyes of the traffic cops at the intersections.

[Turn page]

Marshal Field's store still stood, steamers blew their whistles on the water, the trains on the Illinois Central still blew their funny horns and the colored folk were still jammed in the sprawling slums of the South Side without the musical benefit of Johnny Dodds, Bessie Smith and the white boys from the Austin High School who once sneaked out there to listen—and bring to life—the Chicago style in jazz.

Me, I was in the toddlin' town to dig the know-how on the late L. Rizola. The address on his driving license said Apartment 21 at 2879 South Rankin Avenue. That was a rundown zone near State Street and I went there in a taxi three minutes after my train pulled in on track sixteen.

I paid off the jockey outside Number 2879. It was big and shambling and five shades more crummy than the Alford. Basement steps went down into a beer parlor. I could hear the talk buzz and the monotone chant of the waiters. I could also see that the doorway loungers had their speculative eyes on me.

A brassy blonde in a jade green dress idled at the combination reception desk and switchboard. If you blew on her face the powder would rise in little clouds. She had been pretty in a bold way a long time back. Now puffy skin lidded the kind of sharp green eyes that know all the wrong answers.

She let her well-constructed contours rest negligently on the counter-top, put her chin on the palm of her left hand and stuck her index finger between her large white teeth. She turned the finger round in her mouth and gave it a tentative bite.

"Yeah?" She said it trying to sound like her favorite movie heroine. The impersonation was so bad it could have been any one of three actresses and none of them would say "Yeah." Not before the recording engineers, anyway.

I said: "I'm calling on Mr. L. Rizola."

She took her finger out of her mouth, looked at it, then popped it back. There was a thin crescent of black under the scarlet lacquer. Maybe she liked the taste.

"He ain't here," she said. Her eyes traveled down from my face to my suit and then to my shoes. "You look real nice," she offered conversationally. "Not like most of the—" She left the sentence unfinished and gave a contemptuous shrug.

I said, patiently: "Thanks. The tribute is appreciated. But about Rizola—"

A flicker passed over her eyes. "Him," she sneered. "What you want with that kinda guy?" Another look came on her face and stayed a moment. "You a copper?"

I shook my head.

"No—this is just a business call. But if he isn't here it looks like I've wasted my time. Know where he went?

SHE lifted her shoulders a couple of inches. "No. He lived here all of twelve months. Left about three months back."

"Know where he came from? His home. That kind of stuff?"

She splayed her hands on her hips and stood back a little, swaying gently while she did it.

"No," she said. "No, I wouldn't know where a cheapskate like Louis Rizola comes from or where he's going. I wouldn't care, I guess."

Suddenly, she quit swaying and leaned swiftly forward, letting her right hand go out and touch the left side of my coat. When she pulled her hand back there was another and altogether different look in her eyes.

"So you go around rodded-up, huh?" she said softly. "Maybe you're a big shot. Maybe you want to settle sumpn' with Louis Rizola. Brother, if I knew, I'd be happy to tell you. The dirty little—" She left that sentence unfinished, too.

I said: "He make a pass at you?"

She lit a cigarette, dragged on it, then hid it on a shelf below counter-level. She blew the smoke out in a long stream and spoke at the same time.

"Yeah—maybe a little more than that," she said. "You look kinda different," she murmured.

I thought she probably had to spend a lot of time trying to stand off two-bit dates and not always making it. I flipped a five dollar note out of my billfold, palmed it on to her hand. She let her fingers curl upward and press mine. Unlike her made-up puss the skin of her hand was smooth and soft and

suprisingly cool to the touch.

"What's that for, brother?"

"Present for a good girl."

She showed me her teeth in a cynical laugh.

"Where'd you get the idea I was good?" she said.

"I didn't say *what at*," I cracked. "It's a present, just the same."

"No strings?"

"No strings."

She thought that one out for a minute while she folded the note into a little square and dropped it down the cleavage of her dress.

When she spoke, her voice was thoughtful. "Rizola had some kinda place out near the forest preserve west of Evanston," she said. "He holed-up there times. I never did know just where it was, but there's a guy in the poolroom knows."

"What kind of a guy?"

She twisted her red lips a little.

"Rizola's kind. Ask for Don Nawahi—"

I looked at her. "A Flip?"

"No—he's from the Islands. Tahiti. Been here three-four years. Little guy with shiny hair, crimped up." She picked the cigarette off the ledge and hung it between her lips. "Watch your step, mister. He carries a big gun under his arm."

I nodded and went back out of the lobby, aware that her eyes were following me as I did it. I walked straight through the loungers on the steps and went on down into the beer parlor. Cigarette fog drifted under the fluorescent lights and the air was heavy with the smell of cheap whiskey and perspiration. The shade temperature would be about eighty-two and a half.

Half a dozen card games were on, but the center table was getting most audience-reaction. A big red sweaty guy with checkerboard suspenders and a day-old chin stubble was cuddling a raft of poker chips as I moved close in.

I went on past the table, down to a bar which spanned the back of the parlor. There was more light here and several men were leaning with their elbows on the counter. One of them had his back to me, but I knew he was Don Nawahi.

HE TURNED as I came up. He had the compact build you find on the Islanders but wasn't so tall as most. His clothes were strictly Hollywood. He was not more than five feet six inches tall and if he weighed a hundred and thirty that would be the limit. His shiny crimped hair grew into a long thick point at the nape of his neck and he had three-inch sideburns. His small even teeth were whiter than a toothpaste ad, and he smelled faintly of perfume.

I leaned against the bar and bought a glass of something they said was whiskey. It tasted like fifth-grade speakeasy corn mash left over from the Capone empire.

But I drank a little of it and half-turned toward Don Nawahi.

I said: "My name's Bogard. I'm here on a visit, looking for an old acquaintance. Louis Rizola. . . ."

His black eyes snapped quickly. Then the look was gone. Now there was no expression even though he flashed his white teeth in a long smile.

"He used to be in here a lot. I thought maybe someone might know his address. His home, I mean—not the apartment above," I went on.

Nawahi said softly. "You got business with Louie?"

"Yeah," I said. "Good business, I guess, if I can contact him."

Don Nawahi got a cigarette into his mouth, spun a tiny flame from a fancy colored lighter. He let the cigarette smoke dribble upward into his nostrils while he looked me over again.

"You stranger?"

"Yeah," I said. "New York."

I knew I shouldn't have said that because of the sudden interest that shone in his beady eyes.

He said, very softly now: "Louie went to New York maybe two-three months ago. . . ."

I tried to cover up. "When I say New York, I've only been back there a week from Philadelphia. Been there on a . . . job." I tried to make that sound as though I had been working a heist or kidnaping a youthful heiress from the Chestnut Hill aristocracy.

"Yeah?" he said carefully. "That must be how you missed out on Louie."

But I thought of another angle. Bogard thinking fast on his clumsy feet. "I haven't heard of him being around in New York. Could be he came back."

He took his cigarette out of his long mouth and gave a good imitation of studying it.

"Could be," he agreed.

"Know a guy who might have his home address?"

He looked up from under half-closed lids. "Yeah."

"Who would that be?" I asked gently.

"Me."

I called for two more shots of rye, slid his along to him.

Don Nawahi said: "You on the level?"

I nodded.

"Not copper?"

I shook my head.

He thought for another minute. Then: "Okay—Louie has a little shack west of Evanston. It belongs to him. He only lived in the joint upstairs on account of it was handy for business." He fished in a pocket, came out with a little black book. He flipped it open in the center, said: "Address is Lakeside Cabin, Sheldon Driveway. If you see Louie tell him I still love him, will you?"

I told him I would do that, finished off the poison and left. Don Nawahi had already idled across the room as though the talk had begun to bore him. He didn't even trouble to let his eyes follow me out.

Chapter IX

AT A PLACE downtown I hired a drive-yourself car, handed over the deposit, paid the insurance charge and another two-fifty for gas. The attendant who filled the tank told me the shortest cut out to Evanston.

It was another perfect day and the drive was exhilarating. I made good time because the car I'd hired was a Buick convertible very much like mine but not in such good shape. I nurse my car on account of I can't afford to buy a new one this year. Or next.

The city suburbs thinned, finally vanished and I pushed my foot down to let the tree-fringed highway rush toward me like a long white ribbon. In a little while I was passing a lot more trees. I was moving into the forest preserve.

I had to stop once to re-read the attendant's penciled directions, then made a couple of right-hand turns off the main highway, climbing a long hill, drifting down again and taking another turn into a narrow rutted roadway which flanked a small lake. There were several frame bungalows and Lakeside Cabin was the last of them—squatting almost on the shore. I let the hired heap kill itself in front of the porch and climbed out.

The place was fairly solidly built of knotty pine but it hadn't had much attention. The door needed paint and the window drapes were faded to any color you liked. Four wood steps led up to the door. I was taking the third when the door opened and a girl came out.

She didn't come out far. This was because she decided to lean her rounded shoulders against the lintel and give me the once-over. I stand nearly six feet in my socks and I don't have to worry much about my weight yet, so maybe she was satisfied with what she saw.

"Hello there," she said.

She was the girl in the snapshot I had found on Louie Rizola's body. I thought she was maybe twenty-five years old, and had at least half-Italian parentage. Her hair was blue-black and cascaded onto her shoulders. She was wearing a cerise silk robe. I didn't think she was wearing anything else. She had olive skin, tanned a little from the sun, luminous black eyes and the underlip of her full mouth jutted sensuously.

I said: "Hello. My name is Dale Bogard. I—"

She said: "Never mind the reason for being here. I haven't seen a man in a month. Come in and have some Scotch."

I felt my eyebrows rise slightly. Not more than three inches.

"Yeah," she said. "That's right. Scotch. I got Scotch."

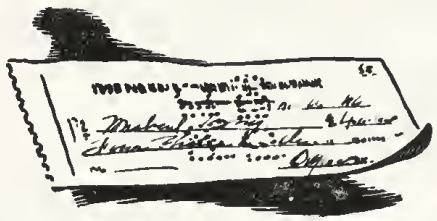
'I'm on my way in," I said.

She stood back a little, making a small

movement as she crossed one thigh over the other. I could see all the shape of her under the robe. For the record, I should tell you that she had a good shape.

The door closed with a faint click and she followed me into a wide cool living room with a little dinette over to the left. The living room was plainly furnished, but it was clean and neat, and the sofa had been covered with chintz. There were two hand-worked rugs on the floor. Large ones.

I sat on the edge of the sofa, watching her as she made two drinks, sliding little ice-cubes off her long palm into the tall glasses. She swayed across the room toward



LOONY LYRIC

Oh, sad was the fate
Of Mortimer Blizz—
He signed a check
That wasn't his!

—J. B.

me, letting her blue-black hair slope across her face in case I thought that was fetching.

"Here's to you, big man." She was very close to me as she said it. That was why I could smell the whiskey on her breath. The pupils of her eyes were dilated a little. It was still quite a while till sundown.

I took down some of the whiskey. It was Scotch all right. Then I said: "I'm looking for the family of Louis Rizola. . . ."

That was when she quit swaying and backed off, putting her glass down on a coffee table.

She didn't speak for perhaps half a minute. When she did it was to say, quite simply: "Louie don't have no family I ever heard tell of. What's he done?"

I didn't answer her directly. I said: "This his only home?"

She put her bottom against the coffee table, placing her hands behind her on the circular top.

"Yeah," she said. "The only home he had, I guess. Maybe the only real thing he ever had—except me." She gave a little sensuous smile as though the implication in what she had said pleased her.

I let her have it then.

"He's dead," I said.

SHE pushed her hands down a little harder on the table, stared at me. There was no other sign that she felt anything.

I said: "Maybe I shouldn't have said that so bluntly. I'm sorry. . . ."

She said, as though she hadn't heard me; "His kind die young. Guys with guns. That's how it always is." She half-turned, picked up her glass. "I think I need this," she said.

I watched her drink half of a tall glass full of Scotch without pausing. Color flooded her face but she didn't even catch her breath.

"Okay," she said. "I can take it. I'll miss Louie. Maybe he wasn't no Hollywood idol not with that schnozzle—but he treated me right. A girl like me don't find a whole lotta guys who treat her right." She stopped musing to say sharply: "Who gave it to him?"

I said: "That's one thing I want to find out."

"Copper?" She got the word out of the corner of her full lips.

"No—a private eye."

"A shamus. Who are you working for?"

I told her as much of the background as seemed to matter. I went on. "Louie operated in Chicago. Know why he went to New York?"

She walked across the room to the window, not swaying now, and stood looking down at the blue lake. Over her shoulder she said. "He left here three months ago to pull some job for a big shot. That help?"

"Yeah," I said. "But it would help more if I had a name."

She stopped looking out of the window, came back toward me, cupping her hands

to light a cigarette. She flicked the match into the wide fireplace.

"A gambler named Nick Gelder," she said. "Louie said he was opening a classy joint in New York. Gelder went there only a little while back. Chicago was getting a trifle warm for him, I guess."

Something clicked in my mind. I said: "What did this Gelder look like?"

She lifted a hand to toss her magnificent mane back over her right shoulder. "I can show you," she said.

She moved over to a built-in arrangement. She opened a door and took out a bundle of old pictures. She selected one as if she were picking a card from a deck, held it in her palm so that I could look down.

I did that. I was looking at a print which showed Louie Rizola leaning on the door of a Cadillac. The man at the wheel was big and had strong regular features. He had a lot of thick gray hair. He had a light tan. He was Leroy Kalda.

"That's Gelder," she said. "Any more names you want?"

"No," I said slowly. "No more names, baby."

She dropped the picture carelessly on the floor, suddenly thrust herself close to me.

"Not even mine, honey?"

I heard myself asking what it was, though I didn't give a damn if it was Cinderella Crump.

"Patty," she said. "Patty Amando. Like it?"

"It's a very pretty name," I said.

"And I am a veree pretty girl, am I not?" As she said it, she wound her arms round the back of my neck and pulled my head down so that her ripe lips bruised themselves against mine. I could feel the shape of her against me now. I still thought she didn't have anything on under the silk robe.

I never did get to know. This was because a thin, tight voice spoke suddenly from the doorway.

It said: "Okay—break it up. Keep the hands raised. Make it pretty now."

Don Nawahi came swiftly and softly into the room. He had a huge Colt in his left hand.

He moved around in a little crescent, flashing his small white teeth.

"You ain't so smart," he sneered.

I thought he had something, but I didn't tell him.

Patty Amando leaned her back against the built-in. Her eyes glared hate.

"Get out," she said. "Get out, you yellow punk."

Don Nawahi shut his long trap-mouth. Something horrible glittered in his eyes.

"You pay for that, yes." He said it in a little deadly whisper. Then he laughed shrilly. "Not with a bullet. I keep that for the shamus."

PATTY AMANDO jumped at him. As she came, he lifted his foot and kicked her in the shins. Then he slapped her viciously across the side of her face. The Colt hardly moved in his hand.

"That's just a little," he whispered. "I like girls who fight. I like to tame them. Baby, will we have fun when I get you alone in here after. . . ." He let the gun jump up in his hand so that it pointed in the middle zone of my chest.

The back of my neck was as wet as a shore boulder at high tide and there was a noise in my ears. It sounded like the wind, though I knew there wasn't any wind.

Don Nawahi let his voice relax. "So you found Louie, shamus? That's too bad. I killed him."

I knew he was going to say that. There was no other reason for what he was doing.

"Yeah," he said, "I killed him. A two grand job. And I only stayed one night in New York. The coppers won't be looking in Chicago for the killer, will they, shamus?"

"They will when I tell them," I said.

He gave another shrill laugh.

"You ain't going to tell nobody a thing, shamus. This was a smart operation and it ain't going to be jammed-up by a private peeper."

I didn't say anything. I didn't know that there was anything to say. The roof of my mouth felt like hot sandpaper and if I still had legs somebody would have to prove it to me.

Nawahi shut his eyes, opened them, looked across at Patty Amando.

"Come here, baby," he said softly.

She walked very quietly toward him. When she got within a couple of feet he suddenly brought his balled fist up in a tight swing and hit her in the stomach.

"That's where the shamus gets the first slug," he breathed. "If you ain't too sick, baby, you can watch me do it. After that, Bogard gets the rest of the clip. . . ."

Patty Amando had doubled-up with a little choking cry. Then her legs buckled under her and she went down by the side of the built-in arrangement, her hands clawing at the side of it. Broken sobs came from her.

"I like to see 'em crawl," said Don Nawahi in his flat gangster's voice. He brought the gun up a fraction, flexed his finger on the trigger. I could see the big hammer rising. I kept on looking at it, though there was something else to look at now. Something Don Nawahi never would see.

A little spurt of orange flame speared the air. There was a sharp crack. Don Nawahi's huge Colt tumbled from his hand, thudded on the wooden floor, rolled over. It made a dull plop as it went off. The big shell made a louder sound as it slammed into the wall.

Don Nawahi rocked back and forth on his neat shoes. Where his thin mouth had been was a big bloody hole. The hole kept getting bigger. Blood flooded down his chin, ran over his snazzy Hollywood clothes. All that was left of his face were his eyes. They wore a surprised look. Then his legs folded gently. He went down very slowly on all-fours, rolled over and lay outstretched, looking at the ceiling and not seeing it because he never was going to see anything again.

Patty Amando came up off the floor with a .38 caliber in her hand. A police gun. It was in the built-in.

I said: "From now on anything I have is yours."

"I think I am going to be sick," she said.

I found brandy, gave her a little. I carried her over to the sofa. She lay back with her eyes closed. Then the nausea passed. I went on standing there looking down at her.

"I'm going back to New York," I said. "I'm going to get Nick Gelder."

"Yeah," she whispered. "He really killed Louie, didn't he? He gave the order."

I nodded. "I'll make a report for the police. I'll come back and testify why you had to shoot Nawahi. Anything you want."

"Good luck—Dale," she said.

I bent suddenly and kissed her briefly. "You saved my life—do you understand?" I asked.

She said, steadily: "Mine too—or something maybe more important. *He* would have made living something I don't like to think about."

"Just the same, I owe you a debt, Patty. Any time you want to collect. . . ."

Patty Amando smiled with her eyes. Very faintly.

"Maybe I will," she said.

Chapter X

I WALKED out of Grand Central terminal into a heat haze which dimmed the high peak of the Chrysler building. The temperature was nudging the nineties and girls were hurrying to the bus stops in strapless, shoulderless dresses, which shows there is something to be said for a heat wave if you like to see girls in strapless, shoulderless dresses.

Me, I wasn't bothered. What I was bothered about was how Lola Broekman knew Mrs. Thelma Farland was engaging a private eye. It was something I should have thought of right off. Maybe it was time I put the creaking Bogard mechanism into high gear.

I rode a taxi to my apartment, stepped into the building's lobby.

Bella looked up.

"Hi, Mr. Bogard."

I told her "Hi!" too and flashed her what I thought was a nice homecoming smile. She nearly let me get into the little elevator before she called, softly and clearly: "Oh . . . Mr. Bogard."

I turned like a dog whistled back from the chase, went obediently up to her counter.

"Yes, Bella?"

She laid her clear gray eyes on me.

"Aren't you glad to see me?"

I said I was glad.

She pouted. I had never seen Bella pout before. She looked rather nice doing it.

"If," I said, "you require some further proof of my pleasure at seeing you, how will this do?" As I said it I bent swiftly over the little rail that fences Bella in from the paying guests and got an arm round her soft shoulders. She didn't put her feet up against the rail to push herself back. What she did was to come forward a little so that I didn't have too much trouble kissing her on her very agreeable mouth.

It suddenly came to me that it was much nicer kissing Bella than all the assorted nymphomaniacs who bob up every once in a while in the kind of cases I get. It also came to me that I was getting on dangerous ground and that if I didn't watch my step I might shuffle off to Buffalo one of these days with Mrs. Bella Bogard and I didn't want anything like that.

Did I?

I didn't know. Hell, quit examining your damnfool heart, Bogard, and break this case.

Bella said, as though nothing had happened: "Detective O'Cassidy phoned in."

"He did?"

"He wants you to contact him the moment you return," said Bella primly. "This would appear to be the moment."

"You sure he's not in my apartment guzzling my beer?"

"Mister O'Cassidy," intoned Bella, "is a responsible officer of the law. I am sure he would never dream of guzzling your beer."

I pulled the lobe of her left ear. "Get along with you," I said.

THE telephone jangled as I walked into my living room, throwing my two-suiter on to the sofa. I got the receiver against my shoulder and a Lucky in my mouth.

" 'Lo. Dale."

The voice belonged to Wes Delaney, who is one of the three best informed reporters in Manhattan. Wes blew in from the Hearst empire in Chicago around the time Dempsey fought Firpo. Every time he stops you on the street he tells you he means to go back to the Windy City. I think he means for burial.

I said: " 'Lo, Wes," and we used a little time wise cracking.

Finally he got around to what was on his mind.

"You handling the case of a long-lost son?"

"Yeah," I said, "among a raft of other things. Who told you?"

"We keep our ears to the ground in the newspaper game. . . ."

"Don't give me that," I told him, "I used to be a newspaperman. What you mean is that some cop got talkative over a drink."

Delaney said: "I wouldn't say O'Cassidy shoots his mouth for a drink—even Scotch."

"Okay, Wes," I said softly, "just what does Cass say about me?"

"He said a guy with a big nose threw a gun on you and that McNulty has since found the guy shot dead in an empty apartment in the Fifties. There is also a guy strangled with wire in a downtown hotel. A crummy dump. He also said you told him something about looking for a missing son. It was that which interested me. . . ."

I held the receiver so hard my hand started to ache.

"Why?"

Delaney went on: "Something I didn't tell O'Cassidy. Brod Laine, the City Editor, was leafing through the agony ads about a week ago looking for a story-line when he saw something which interested him. Figured there might be an angle to it."

I said: "Quit horsing around and tell it."

"It was a very short ad. Wait a minute, I'll read it to you." There was a pause, then his voice came on again. "This is it: *Mrs. T. Farland, 241 Eldon Street, Manhattan, seeks information which may lead to an interview with her son, adopted by an unknown family July, 1927. Box 862-Times.*"

I went on saying nothing and hanging on to the receiver. I thought that if I held it that way another minute it would probably crack in pieces.

Delaney was saying: "You on this case, Dale?"

"Yeah," I said. "Yeah, I am."

"Brod's playing a hunch there may be

something in back of it. That's why we didn't come clean with the Police Department. Now there's homicide mixed up with it, want to say a piece for publication?"

I told him I didn't want to do that.

I could almost hear Delaney not saving anything.

"There'll be a story in it, Wes. I'll keep you way out front if it breaks."

I slid the receiver back on its cradle, sat staring at nothing. I was beginning to understand a number of things. I was also thinking that from now on I had better read the morning papers from front to back.

Meantime, I had something else on my mind. James Caffrey Broekman. I thought it was time we had a little talk at his penthouse.

I washed my hands and face, changed my shirt, sank a Budweiser and got out my convertible. I headed into the traffic whistling the *Beale Street Blues*. I was half-a-tone off pitch in the middle part.

A MASSIVE white column grew skyward from behind an edging of privet hedge. A green canopy led to a glass double-door wide enough for the main entrance to Macy's. There was a six-foot-two flunkey looking like an ex-Marine trying to look like a flunkey and not liking it too well.

He said: "Good-evening, sir." He said it with a Bronx accent trying to sound like the late C. Aubrey Smith and not liking that, either.

I said: "Mr. Bogard calling on Mr. Broekman."

He pushed his shoulders back so that I could see the muscles ripple under the lightweight green uniform.

"Appointment, sir?"

"No appointment."

He got a hard look into his face and the Bronx back into his voice.

"There was a chance you had an appointment and didn't know the old man had been called away," he said evenly. "Not much of a chance. But a chance. I gave you that." He paused, letting his long arms swing lazily at his side.

I slid a hand into my breast-pocket. I palmed the photostat of my license about level with his chest.

He stared down at it, said: "A private dick, huh? You coulda told me. Not that it admits you here with no questions asked."

"Go on—ask me," I said.

He turned his gorilla-shoulders on me, walked into the lobby. I went on in after him. The place was as large as Billy Rose's. The floor was made of black glass and was dotted with cream rugs shaped like diamonds. A tall languid receptionist in black satin looked up from her desk.

"Yes?" She was using an Oxford accent.

The ex-Marine said: "This gentleman is calling on Mr. Broekman. Mr. Broekman isn't in, is he?"

The languid one placed the back of her hand against her mouth so that I would know she was yawning.

"No, I rather think not," she intoned.

I said: "Send my name up to Miss Lola Broekman—if she hasn't been called away, too."

A moment later I was on my way up.

A pale green sea of inch-deep pile flowed along the corridor, lapping the polished ivory walls and reflecting in the lalique glass fixtures. The Broekman's door moved soundlessly inward and a pert maid with four-inch spike heels and a five-inch uplift gave me the eye.

"Mr. Bogard?" She said it with a little rising inflexion.

I said I was Mr. Bogard.

She let me see her white teeth as she stood back with a little inclination of her shiny black head.

"Miss Broekman is expecting you, Mr. Bogard. Please to come this way."

We negotiated a sub-ocean of cream pile, fetched-up against some more double doors. The maid got them open, stood aside for me to pass.

"Mr. Bogard," she said. That made three times she had said it and I thought she ought to know it well by now.

"Thank you, Letitia." Miss Lola Broekman got up off a lounging chair, dropped a newspaper with studied carelessness on the floor.

I moved on into a room with three walls. What should have been the fourth was solid

glass. This let you catch-up on your viewing of the river.

"Is her real name Maggie?" I asked sourly.

Miss Lola Broekman let one eyebrow flicker upward slightly while the other stayed where it was. She gave a low laugh.

"It's Sally," she said. "But she really is French. What do you want?"

"A nice intimate chat with your old man," I said succinctly.

She brought her eyebrow down to level and narrowed her lids. She moved herself a little under her short-jacketed cord-stripe ribadune, reached down and dug a wrapped chocolate from a box, stripping off the foil and not looking at me.

"Why?" she said in a brittle voice.

I dropped my hat on a chair and put my shoulders against the mantelpiece.

"On account of I might get at the truth about some things that are going on around here," I said.

She rolled the wrapping into a tiny ball and spun it into the empty grate. She got the chocolate between her front teeth, bit on it so that the cordial burst delicately over the taste buds of her tongue.

"You contrive to be an offensive man, don't you?" she said.

"Yeah," I said. "I always get offensive when people stall on me and hit me on the back of the head with a sap and then try to frame me on a murder rap."

SOMETHING looked at me out of her eyes then. It could have been horror. It could have been bewilderment. It could have been any damn thing you like. I didn't know. But I was going to.

"What exactly is that supposed to mean?" She asked it in a low tight voice with an edge to it. You could use the edge to carve a stale roll.

I said: "You sent Roland Perle to try to buy me off the Farland case, didn't you?"

She got the look out of her eyes and gave a little laugh without any mirth in it. "I didn't say so," she murmured.

I got a Lucky into my mouth, lit it, blowing out soft smoke and hard words. "I'm saying it," I snarled at her. "It had to be that way because I played a hunch on it and it came off."

"Yes?" She yawned the word at me. "I'm not particularly interested in the so-called hunches of cheap private detectives."

"I'm so cheap they can hire me for fifty a day," I said, "and some smart operators can't hire me for five grand. I get into some cases without being hired by anybody. This could be one of them. After Perle called on me I could guess at only one family who might want a lot of secrecy. Yours. So I called this place on my phone—and you answered. You were so damned smart you fell for it."

She lowered herself elegantly on the wide arm of the chair, folded her hands in her lap and tried to look like Shirley Temple.

"Suppose everything you say is correct," she said evenly. "I don't have to supply footnotes."

I grinned down at her. "No," I said softly, "you don't have to supply them. But maybe it would be better if you did. That way you will at least know what I'm doing. Keep stalling me off and you won't get any peace wondering where I'm going to poke next."

She went on sitting there with her hands folded, her eyes looking at me and not seeing me because she was trying to figure it out. Finally, she said in a quiet voice: "There are reasons, Mr. Bogard, why it was desirable not to have you pry in this matter. They are family reasons. They are good reasons. I mean they appear to be good and sufficient to the Broekman family—"

Something in the way she said it made me cut in.

"You mean reasons which look good to you personally, don't you?"

She went on as though I hadn't spoken: "I said they were good reasons. I cannot at this stage disclose what they are. I ask you to believe that they are genuine. You do not, surely, suspect me of some sort of criminal motive?"

"Stranger things have happened," I said. "Why did you send that dissolute brother of yours to beat me up?"

A flush spread slowly across her face, faded. But the hard look in her eyes didn't

"Larry is my brother," she said. "It happens that I am fond of him. You seem bent on insulting my family as much as you can."

"Why?" I asked again.

She shrugged. "I didn't send him. I mentioned your attitude and he happened to hear me. Larry is impulsive. He isn't the kind to stand by when someone insults me."

I stared. "Quit trying to act the innocent heroine of a Grade Three soap opera," I jeered. "You don't need a spoiled lush-head like Larry to protect you."

Suddenly, she jumped off the chair. The noise her hand made when it slapped me across the left cheek was loud enough for the French maid to hear if she was listening and she would be doing that if she was as smart as she looked.

I sent both my hands out and got hold of Miss Lola Broekman's shoulders. I used enough pressure to hurt, letting my grip slide down her forearms a little so that she couldn't use her hands again. She stood quite still, her lips parted slightly against her shining teeth and her eyes snapping at me. Then they stopped snapping.

"What are you going to do?" She asked it in a quick throbbing tone.

"I ought to put you over my knee and give you a good old-fashioned spanking," I told her. Instead, I let my hands drop.

She swayed off from me for a second, then moved close in until her body was against me. I could hear her breathing. It was a little faster than normal.

"I might like that—Dale," she whispered.

Then her arms were sliding under my jacket and round my back.

"You feel nice under your shirt," she said.

"I'll bet you do, too," I said. I thought my voice sounded a little thick and I hadn't been drinking.

She tilted her head back fractionally, keeping her eyes wide open. I could feel the rise and fall of her breasts. I couldn't feel my legs on account of they had gone off somewhere and I didn't know how to get them back.

"Want to . . . find out?" She only just said the words.

I let one hand go in under her jacket and stay against the small of her back. I could tell that it would be a beautiful back.

"You can kiss me now," she breathed, "and then we can forget all about this silly old case. . . ."

I bent and kissed her on the mouth. Only once. It lasted about three and a half minutes. Her mouth was large and warm and melting. There were also other interesting things about it. Then I got my hands back on her shoulders and stood her off me.

"That's for the slap," I said. "For that and not for anything else."

She twisted herself free, walked backward a few steps.

"You—you . . ."

I grinned wickedly.

"I mean you can't get me off this case by waving a few curves at me," I said.

She went on standing there, her hands clenching and unclenching and a lot of emotions criss-crossing her face. I didn't identify any nice ones.

"Get out!" She said it with difficulty because she was trying to say it with her teeth together.

I started for the door, picking my hat up as I went. I didn't even bother to look back. I had my hand on the knob when the door began to open. I stood back. In another moment it was wide open. A man came briskly through it.

He was Leroy Kalda.

Chapter XI

CLOSE up, he was as tall as me and a good twenty-five pounds heavier. His tan was the kind you put on. But his thick iron-gray hair was his own. It had a slight wave and was long enough to skim his ears. He was still wearing a midnight blue tuxedo. His eyes were flat and shiny and there would be a soft-calf holster clipped under his left armpit.

I stood back a little behind the door as he came in. He hadn't seen me.

"Hello, Nick," I said softly.

He turned slowly, doing it carefully on the balls of his feet, his face and voice under control.

"I beg your pardon," His voice had the right note of uncertainty. But he couldn't

mask his eyes. They were the kind of eyes that have stared out of hoodlums' faces since the days of the old-line gunmen out West.

I leaned lightly against the swung-open door.

"Gelder's the name, isn't it?" I said. "Nick Gelder?"

He let his heavy lips curl back from his mouth. This was so that I could see him smile. I could also see his teeth. They were beautifully formed and must have cost him a stack of dough.

"It would be interesting, I think, to know exactly what you are talking about," he said.

Lola Broekman swayed across the room. She had stopped clenching her fists and biting her teeth together. Now she was trying to drip sex again.

"This man came in here and was rude to me," she said lazily. "Do something about it, Roy, please."

Gelder grinned some more. He made a movement which was so fast that it seemed scarcely a movement at all, and the only reason it didn't connect was because I had decided to move first.

I hit him solidly in the mouth. Blood spurted over my hand. He went straight backward, his hands rushing to his face. Not so much because he was hurt. I had knocked his upper denture loose and he was getting it back on his gums before Miss Lola Broekman could see.

He went on staggering back. He got his hands away from his face, drove one hand swiftly into his shirt.

I snarled at him. "Drop that rod, Gelder. You're looking at one."

He zig-zagged, his eyes brilliant with hate. When he spoke his voice was hardly above a whisper.

"There'll be another time, Bogard. You should remember that."

I walked a little toward him, holding my Luger waist-high and aiming it where his stomach was beginning to grow too much.

"You shouldn't have said that, Gelder. You're not supposed to know who I am, are you? "

Lola Broekman ran at me. I got hold of her left wrist and bent it back until she cried out.

"You little fool," I snapped. "What the hell do you think you're doing, messing with gangsters?"

"How—how dare you! Roy is a friend . . . I—"

I spun her from me.

"Yeah," I said, "I can see that. He is also Nick Gelder, a big time gambling operator who had to take it on the lam out of Chicago. Very tough people is Mr. Nick Gelder *alias* Mr. Leroy Kalda *alias* any other damn name you like."

"You—you're utterly impossible," she stormed.

I stepped smartly up to the big hood, slammed the Luger muzzle against his belly and yanked his jacket wide open. It was a soft-calf gun clip all right. The handle of a Mauser stuck out a little.

"Respectable citizens don't go around with guns," I said. "How do you like that, baby?"

She bit her lip. "I have no doubt Roy has excellent reasons," she said coldly. "You go around with a gun, don't you?"

"Only when I'm on a case." I said. "This bird isn't on one, is he? Or is he?"

I got his Mauser out, stepped backward over the room, lowering myself into a chair and putting the Luger flat on the arm. Then, swiftly, I broke the Mauser and ejected the shells. I snapped the gun back, tossed it to him. I climbed back slowly onto my feet, wagging the Luger at him again.

"Goodbye, people," I said pleasantly. "Or maybe *au revoir*."

I stepped through the door, stood there another moment looking at them. Nick Gelder had death in his eyes and a purple balloon where his upper lip had been. Lola Broekman was very white, but she still looked good enough to eat.

If you liked poisoned fruit. . . .

BELLA wasn't around when I got back to my apartment. I rode up, walked absently down the short corridor to my two rooms. The door was open maybe a couple of inches. I could hear liquid going into a glass. I thought it had a pleasant sound. I kicked the door open and marched in.

Detective Lieutenant O'Cassidy looked up.

A wan smile sat on his pale face.

"Have a drink, Dale," he said.

I junked my hat, took the glass from him.

"Bottoms up," he said. "Too bad you keep your whiskey under lock and key. I had to manage with the Budweiser."

I sat down heavily and eyed him. He still had his ratty old raincoat on and the snap-brim hat which hadn't snapped in more than five years. He still looked taut and harassed and nervy and he still didn't have any nerves unless he was using steel coils. I still liked him.

He said: "I left a message with that girl of yours for you to come down Centre Street way and have a talk. Very long time no see, Dale."

"Four days," I said shortly. "And what do you mean by that crack about Bella?"

"I mean she works here. On the board. Don't tell me there's a romance on the way in."

I grinned at him.

"There ought to be, at that," he said slowly. "It's time you got yourself some regular work and stayed home nights instead of . . ." He let the sentence go unfinished.

"Instead of what?" I said.

Cass took a long slow drink, then set the glass down carefully.

"Instead of tangling with police work and buttoning up that mouth of yours when it oughta be unbuttoned," he answered.

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning Louis Rizola for one thing," he said softly.

I decided not to say anything, but I should have known better. Cass doesn't let you decide not to say anything when he has other ideas.

"You know a mug named Louis Rizola, don't you, Dale?"

"Yeah," I told him. "The bird with the eggnose."

Cass tipped his hat back a little more off his glistening forehead. A strand of his lank black hair trailed across his temple.

"Louie's dead, Dale," he said. "You know that, too, don't you?"

I cupped the glass in my hands, sat staring into it for a moment. I knew I was going to have to tell him now. Maybe not all of it. But enough to keep him on the Bogard team.

So I told him about the way I was sapped and woke up with Eggnose dead in the room, about the strangled junky in the Alford Hotel, even about Don Nawahi and Patty Amando. And Leroy Kalda who was Nick Gelder. What I didn't tell him was the theory I was starting to form. Relating the facts to O'Cassidy was helping to form it.

Cass listened with his eyes on me, unwinking, expressionless.

He said: "Somebody tipped the Department off there had been a killing in that apartment block in the Fifties where we found Rizola. It was McNulty got the tipoff. He seemed to be kinda shaken when he didn't find you there. . . ."

"Yeah," I said. "He would be. McNulty doesn't like me."

Cass said: "McNulty is a conscientious officer."

I fed tobacco into my pipe. "Don't give me that line about loyalty to the Department," I said sourly. "You damn well know McNulty hates my guts. I suppose the tipoff hinted that I might be found there?"

Cass grinned faintly, "Sumpn' like that," he conceded. Then he looked up suddenly. "Rizola got his from a Luger shell," he said.

"Matched it up with the rifling?" I asked.

Cass shook a cigarette from a crumpled pack, hung it between his pale lips and scraped a match against the table leg. Then he blew out the flame and let the match fall on my carpet. The way he always does.

"We ain't found the gun," he said. He blew smoke down between his hands, didn't say anything more. I understood that he wasn't going to ask to see my Luger.

There was a little silence. Cass ended it.

"You got any ideas?" he asked simply.

I said: "Yeah—I think Kalda, or Gelder, had me framed. Only I came around fast enough to make a getaway. I also think Kalda or one of his toughies had both Rizola and the junky bumped-off. Kalda wants me off the Farland case. He isn't the only one—but nobody else has tried to kill me, yet."

Cass got up slowly. He stood there for a moment, rocking on his heavy police boots.

Finally, he said: "Kalda ain't been in this

town long. He runs a ritzy gambling joint. He runs other things. He is a very hot character—and the way I see it we got enough hot characters in New York without Mister Leroy Kalda. I want to pin that murder rap right on his shirt. Like to help?"

"Yeah," I said softly. "I'd like to help. I don't like guys who try to frame me for the hot seat."

O'Cassidy walked toward the door.

"Okay," he said. "So we leave it that way just a little while longer. I can keep McNulty quiet. Just one thing, though—watch your step with the Kalda mob. I wouldn't like to find your body in the East River some dark night. . ."

He closed the door silently behind him. I heard his footsteps fade down the corridor. I looked at the beer glass. Then I got my key out and unlocked the cabinet where I kept my Scotch.

I thought I needed it just now.

Chapter XII

I DROVE down Central Park South on to East Fifty-ninth Street and took the Queensboro Bridge route to Long Island. It was late and the traffic was thinning a little. It would be later still when I headed into the lush Sands Point country where the tycoons have their humble twenty-five room mansions. I was going there because it was past time for me to see James Caffrey Broekman and I knew he was home because I had called him on the telephone. He left the penthouse to his son and daughter most of the time. Lola Broekman had said he was away on business. She had said it too glibly. Uh-huh!

Midway through Queens there was a shift in the weather. I could smell rain in the air. A few miles farther east it began to fall. Lightly at first, then with the heavy vehemence of midsummer. Then, as suddenly, it stopped. The roadway shone like wet glass and the smell of damp earth and saturated grass floated agreeably into the convertible. I liked it. The motor liked it.

The Broekman home had a quarter-mile driveway leading from the road. I had to check myself in at a stone-built lodge. A powerfully-set lodgekeeper superintended the checking. He was in his early forties and beginning to put on weight, but he looked about as tough as they come. He wore a crew haircut and an ear like a crumpled sunflower. His face seemed faintly familiar.

"You're Tony Belligi, aren't you?" I asked suddenly.

He gave me a wide grin then.

"Yeah," he said. "Fancy you 'membering that. Say, I ain't fought in ten years."

"Madison Square Garden, June, 1941," I said. "You kayo'd Mitch Jensen."

"Yeah," he said. "Say, that was a fight."

"How come you had to quit after that?"

He leaned heavily against the side of my car. "Mitch sure slapped me around," he said. "I got me a busted jaw and I never could make it after that. I didn't even try. I kinda knew it was curtains. I went in for training young guys, then I got me this job with Mr. Broekman."

"Like it here?" I didn't care if he hated it.

"Yeah," he said. "Sure I like it. It's good dough and not much work. I get into New York every once in awhile to have me a time. You know." He closed one eye.

I told him I knew and tucked a five-spot into the pocket of his checkerboard shirt.

"Okay," he said. "Keep straight up the drive." He leaned in some more. "Talk nice to the butler," he whispered.

I let my car idle round the quarter-moon driveway and kill itself exactly flush with the porch. The porch was wide enough to hold a clambake on. It had five glaring white concrete steps not more than four yards long and the reason I knew they were white was because the front of the Broekman home was floodlit.

There was a doorbell which played soft music when you put your elbow on it. If I owned the house it would give on a twelve-bar blues chorus, but the chances of my owning anything larger than the servants' quarters of the Broekman house might be said not to exist.

When the tuned bells finished their little piece the three-inch glass doors swung open without any apparent human aid. I stepped into a preliminary hallway and waited for someone to operate the mechanism which

parted the stout old oak doors.

They moved inward, flattening themselves against the wall. The butler stood there. He was the youngest butler in the world. He would be twenty-five years old and his face was pallid and deadly. His black eyes burned like hot points in their deep sockets, but he was tall and solid and looked as tough as an all-American quarterback posing for a cigarette promotion ad.

He said, without any special intonation: "Mr. Bogard?"

I told him I was Mr. Bogard. I seemed to be telling all sorts of people I was Mr. Bogard.

"Your credentials, please."

It wasn't an order. It wasn't a question. I didn't know what it was, but I gave him my credentials. He held them in one hand while he reached up with the other to snap lights on. They poured radiance on the Bogard credentials. He seemed to think they would do, motioned to me to follow him across the inner hallway.

The butler gave a sharp clap with his hands as we moved across the polished floor. A dozen unseen lamps shed new radiance. They showed me the brilliance of the parquet floor. They also showed me the kind of furniture which James Caffrey Broekman had installed in his home. The taste was impeccable, the expenditure astronomical. An air-conditioning plant gave the place a cool climate with the faint scent of the sea.

WE CAME to a halt outside an oak-paneled door. The butler knocked three times—using his knuckles to make the middle knock a sustained vibrato.

A distant voice said, deeply: "Come in."

I heard the butler saying: "He is in a bad mood tonight."

Then I was alone and walking through the doors into a room whose ultimate dimensions vanished in a haze of dark. The furniture was heavy enough to have sunk roots into the floor. It was all blood-red mahogany except the sofa drawn up against the fire and the enormous hide leather easy chairs which flanked its sides. It was a midsummer night and logs crackled on the hearth.

James Caffrey Broekman sat facing me. He would be six feet three inches tall if he stood up. He was wearing a tuxedo jacket cut in the style which was fashionable around the time Gene Tunney was telling sports writers about Shakespeare. He wore a narrow wing collar and a hand-tied bow which sealed off the period setting. His bone structure was heavy and powerful and you could still see that his tanned and creased face had once been more than handsome. His dark hair was thick and long and channeled with silver. I knew he was fifty-nine years old and I hoped I would have as much hair if I ever got to be fifty-nine.

I moved close in, stood on the wide beige hearthrug looking down at him. His eyes were a perfect blue and the whites were clear and healthy. Hundreds of tiny lines etched spread-out traceries on his temples. His feet were in shiny black calf slippers and one of his silk socks had squirmed down enough to show a half-inch of his bare leg. It was hairless.

He said: "Well?"

Heard without a door between, his voice was a curious blend of depth and razor-sharpness. I figured that a whole lot of men had trembled before that voice. Guys with wives and kids who had to take any kind of voice James Caffrey Broekman liked to use because the Caffrey dough paid their rent. It didn't pay mine.

I stepped back, sat slowly on the arm of the chair facing his. I put my hands along my knees with my new gray hat between them.

"You're supposed to be tough, Mr. Broekman, aren't you?"

A tiny smile quirked the corners of his long mouth and was gone.

"You don't bother me," I said.

He wriggled his shoulder-blades into the lush comfort of his chair, made a pyramid with his long tapering fingers. Suddenly, he looked relaxed. If he had been in a black mood it was gone now.

"I think I shall like you, young man," he said. "You believe there are times when one should cultivate a little studied insolence. Because I am James Caffrey Broekman this is without doubt, from your point of view, one of those times."

"That's what I thought," I said.

"Few young men—or any other kind of men—do," he went on. "Much of my success has been founded on a certain arrogance of temperament."

"There's a difference," I told him.

He folded his pyramid up, tucked his closed fingers under his heavy chin.

"That is true. You do not have the arrogant temperament which breeds executive success. You are not a leader of men. You are a lone wolf. A single operator. You work better on your own. You probably do well enough out of it."

"Not so well as all that," I said.

"You will," he said. "By the way, just what do you wish to see me about?"

I said briefly: "Your daughter, for one thing."

He answered softly: "You are not trying to operate blackmail. I acquit you of that. Then what?"

"Your daughter," I said, "is playing around with a hoodlum named Leroy Kalda. . . ."

HIS jaw shut in a long compressed line so that you could hardly see his lips. Something terrible looked out of his eyes. The clenched knuckles under his chin shone like white pellets. When he spoke, his voice was hard and rasping.

"Stop him!"

I leaned forward a little.

"How?" I asked.

He took his hands away from his chin, flattened them on the wide arms of his chair, drumming the fingers.

"You are a private detective. I will write you a check for two thousand dollars to stop Kalda involving my daughter."

I grinned at him sourly.

"Miss Broekman," I said, "sent a very fat character by the name of Roland Perle to offer me five thousand dollars for a much easier assignment."

He quit drumming his fingers, said softly: "What was that for?"

I stood up, pushing my hands into my coat pockets.

"To stop investigating a case for a very charming lady—Thelma Farland."

All the color flooded from his face. The eyes that stared up at me were shocked and hurt and unbelieving. When he got his voice to work at last it only rated a dry rustle of sound.

"What are you trying to do? Thelma Farland has been dead twenty years."

"No," I said, "she is not dead."

He passed the back of a hand across his eyes as though his vision had suddenly clouded.

"They told me—" He was saying it as though I wasn't there. Perhaps, for a little while, I wasn't. Then, as swiftly, he brought his hand down hard on the chair, stood up. He towered above my five feet eleven and a half.

"How do you know this?"

I told him. All of it. He stood there, not moving, not saying anything.

At the end of it he said simply: "Where can I see her?"

"No sale," I said.

He swung his fist to and fro at arm's length. I thought he wanted to hit me. But he made no move.

His voice, when he spoke again, was low, almost self-effacing.

"You can't tell me in case she would not wish it?"

I nodded.

"Would—would you take her a message?"

"Yeah," I said slowly, "I think I can do that."

He walked heavily, almost draggingly, over to a long sideboard.

"I think," he said, "I think I will take a drink. Whiskey. Will you join me?"

"Yeah," I said again. "It could be we both need it. What do you want me to tell her?"

He said over his shoulder: "That I would deem it an honor if she would see me. Just that."

"Will do," I said.

I let him take half of his drink. Then I let him have it.

"Is Larry Broekman her son as well as yours?"

He stood there with both hands cupped round his drink. He stared down into it, then lifted his eyes to me. They were misted a little.

"Yes," he answered huskily.

"Larry know that?"

"No."

"Lola?"

He hesitated. "I'm not sure. I think she found out accidentally. She must have, don't you think so? I mean there could be no other reason for her interest in Thelma's advertisement."

I said: "How much do you pay the Hustons?"

He drank a little more of the whiskey.

"When I found out about my son, I made an arrangement to take him from the Hustons. They had grown fond of him. I paid them ten thousand dollars in one sum. I also arranged to pay them five hundred dollars a month as long as both or either of them survived. They were very badly off at the time. I have discharged the obligation faithfully, but I have never seen them since. Not even my secretary knows about the arrangement. I send the check personally from my private account."

I heard what he said, but it didn't matter. Something else had clicked in my mind. Something I hadn't told him. Something that maybe I never would tell him. I didn't know. Not yet.

On an impulse, I put out a hand. He gripped it firmly.

"I like you, Bogard," he said. "Come again—soon."

I swept up my hat and headed for the door. His voice followed me.

"Think you can fix Kalda?" it said.

I turned at the door.

"Yeah," I said softly, "I think so."

I WENT out of the room and into the big hall. The butler slid out from nowhere in particular.

"He's in a good mood now," I said and passed straight on.

I went through the smaller hall, down the steps, climbed into my convertible, drove slowly down the gravel. I thought my rear tires could stand some air at the first service station I hit.

Tony Belligi came out of his lodge smoking a thin black cigar. I told him everything was fine, too.

I got myself some air three miles nearer Manhattan, drove hard and fast through Queens. There was hardly any traffic and no motorcycle cops. I stopped off at an all-night drugstore in Long Island City to buy myself sandwiches and coffee, then headed back over the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan. I ran the convertible into the little garage where I store it, walked back round the block to my apartment and rode up. I was tired. I wanted nothing so much as to sleep. Ten hours.

I knew I wasn't going to get it when I saw the slim pencil of light under the door to my living room. I jerked the Luger out of its holster, got the safety-catch off and slammed in.

The light was coming from my reading lamp. There was a big chair drawn up by the side of it.

Cathy Marton was in the chair. She got up as I came in, came swiftly toward me.

She still wore a gray wool skirt with a white linen blouse. She was hatless and a lightweight powder-blue topcoat lay on the chair back. She still looked lovely. She also looked angry.

"So you finally got here!" The way she said the words they sounded like some kind of accusation.

I sailed my hat to a table, holstered the Luger and planted myself firmly in front of the radiator. Dammit, this was my home. I didn't even trouble to say anything.

She stormed: "What do you mean making me wait two hours?"

"What the hell do you mean by coming here at all?" I snarled at her.

Suddenly, an odd look came into her eyes. She grabbed her handbag, dived in it, came up with a Western Union blank. She thrust it at me.

"What does that mean?" she demanded.

I fingered the form. The telegraphed message said: *Please see me tonight this address. Matter of extreme urgency. Vital preserve secrecy. Wire reply.—Dale Bogard.*

I handed the message back to her. "I didn't send that," I said.

Her voice came in a low whisper. "But—I sent you an answering wire. You must have had it."

"No message," I said grimly. "Whoever sent you that took care of the delivery boy. He's probably filling his report on how somebody mugged him for your answering wire. Maybe right outside this apartment, for all I know."

Cathy Marton moved closer to me. Her eyes were wide, the pupils dilated a little.

"What—what can it mean?" Her voice sounded faint.

I picked up my hat, got a topcoat from my closet.

"Get your things, baby," I said grimly. "We're going riding."

Chapter XIII

A WIND had blown up. It rustled the tall trees as the Buick sped down the highway between the dark fields. Rain clouds had drifted over the night sky again, hiding the moon. The smell of wet earth was heavy on the air and tiny flies buzzed into my hair, making it itch.

Cathy Marton sat very still and troubled. Once she put out a hand, touched me briefly.

"I—I had the wrong idea about you," she said simply. "I'm sorry."

"Uh-huh!" I grunted. "A lot of people get the wrong idea about me at times. You should worry."

She went on musingly: "I think you're rather a nice person."

I didn't say anything. I took my foot a little off the accelerator pedal, watched the needle climb down from the sixties until we were slowing to take the narrow farm road to Belmonte. Heavy blobs of rain smacked the window, ran down in little rivers. The wind rose. Then we were on the gravel drive between the neat lawns. They looked like twin black lakes now. There was no light anywhere, no sound except the wind soughing through the apple orchard.

I got out, held the door open for Cathy Marton. The rain was heavy and cold. I pulled a flashlight out of the dash compartment, snapped the beam on. It focused on the door. The door was open. I could feel Cathy Marton's fingers biting into my arm, She didn't speak. I got my gun out and we went up the steps side by side.

"Lights," I said. "Get them on, Cathy."

She reached out a hand, thumbed the hall switch. We went down the hall to the living-room door. I turned the handle. Nothing happened.

"Key?"

She shook her head. A little shiver ran down her body.

I stood back a few paces, came at the door with my shoulder. I had to do it three more times. Then the whole door swung off the lock, sagged inward. I sent the beam in ahead of me, turned it away.

"Wait a minute," I said thickly. "Better not go in. . . ."

But she had stepped into the room. Then she had all the lights on. She swayed sideways, hit me with her body. I got an arm round her so that she didn't fall.

George Huston was lying on his back in the center of the room. He had a big burned hole between his eyes and caked blood streaking his cheeks. Anna Huston was sitting in a rocking chair with her hands curiously twisted in her lap. She didn't have a face.

"Oh! God, I can't stand it." Cathy Marton turned, buried her face against my shoulder.

"I'll get you a drink," I said.

"No . . . no . . . don't leave me."

I picked her up, carried her across the floor, sat her in a chair and turned the chair so that she didn't have to look. I found brandy for her. I gave myself a shot, went back to look at the Hustons. They were cold, stiffening. It had happened hours ago. Around the time I was talking with James Caffrey Broekman.

THE shots had been fired close up. They weren't copper-nickel shells from a neat .25 automatic. They were big shells, thirty-eights by the look of it. The one which hit Anna Huston had been fired very close. That was why she didn't have a face.

I stood there looking down at them. There was something they could have told me. Now they had taken it with them to the grave. But I would know. I had to know.

Then there was a tiny sound in the room. I turned. Cathy Marton was staring at the

door into the kitchen. It had moved. Very slightly. Then, suddenly, it belched wide open.

Roland Perle came through it.

He had his gun in his right hand, but it wasn't being aimed. It was hanging from one finger hooked round the trigger-guard. He was using the other hand to prop himself sideways against the door lintel. His fat cherubic face was drawn in agony. The white shirt over his stomach was soaked with blood.

Then his hand slid laxly down the door and his legs telescoped under him. He went down on the floor face first, arched his back trying to get onto his hands and knees.

I jumped across the room, tried to lift him a little. He was very hard to lift. I got his head and shoulders to knee level, gave him brandy.

His eyes looked up at me. Clearly. I knew they would not be clear for long. He was going to die in a few minutes.

"I . . . I didn't kill them, Bogard." He jerked the words out with little driblets of blood and froth.

I said gently: "Who was it, Roland?"

He grimaced violently, squeezed his eyes shut, got them open again. For the last time.

"Lola asked me to see the Hustons," he whispered. "I got here when—when the Hustons had been killed. I walked right into . . . it. He—he—"

I put my mouth close to him.

"Who, Roland? Go on—tell it."

"A—a big bony-looking guy . . . very bright red hair . . . I never saw him before. He—he got me in the stomach. He thought I was dead."

I could just hear his voice. Then, suddenly, it came back—quite loud and clear.

"So long, Bogard," it said.

I spoke to him but he didn't hear what I said. His fat body stiffened a little and there was a click as the handle of his Smith and Wesson banged the wood floor.

I let him go softly, stood up. Cathy Marton had her nerve back now. She was almost dead-white but she wasn't shaking any more.

"What—what are we going to do, Dale?"

"Get some law," I said. "Will you do that?"

She nodded, went out into the hall to the old-fashioned wall telephone. I heard her give a number. There was a bureau against the wall. I got the flap down, poked in the pigeon-holes. Insurance policies, bills, receipts, old snapshots taken on vacation. I slid the little center drawer out. There were two envelopes. One contained the marriage certificate of George and Anna, with a 1919 date.

There was a single document in the other envelope. It was a certificate of death and it said that George Alan Huston had died from spinal meningitis and that he was six years old at the time, which was September 7, 1933.

I was still looking at it when I heard Cathy Marton come back into the room. I put the envelope in my breast-pocket and turned to meet her.

IT WAS just after midnight and the rain had gone and the air was clean and fresh. Cathy Marton was in her little apartment near the park. I was in mine.

I was drinking black coffee and not smoking because my mouth was rough from the tobacco it had handled all day. Maybe I should go to bed. I didn't think I could do that. Not yet. I called the operator and got a New Jersey number. It took a little time to get the country doc down from his bed, but I finally made it. He told me what I wanted to know. I sat very still for minutes with the dead phone in my hand thinking about it. I put the receiver back, got a Long Island call without any delay.

Then I spun the dial and heard the buzz at the other end in the Lansdon Apartments. Mrs. Thelma Farland wasn't in bed. She said she had been reading.

I said: "If I call for you in a quarter of an hour can you be ready?"

"Yes," she said. "Where do you want to take me?" I knew what she was thinking from the way her voice rose.

I said slowly: "To see James Caffrey Broekman. Will you do that?"

Her voice made a little sound in my ear. It wasn't anything you could call a word. Just a sound. I waited, not saying anything. It was up to her now.

Words came after a little while. Very quietly.

"Does he want me to?"

"Yes," I told her. "He thought you were dead. That was what they told him."

This time the pause was long. My nerves were a little taut. I could see her standing by the party-line phone, tall and a little faded with age and loneliness, but still beautiful because she had the kind of beauty that comes from within.

"I will come with you," she said at last. "You—you understand that it will perhaps not be easy for me."

I told her I understood that. I held the receiver rather tightly and added: "He says Larry Broekman is your son—and his. He readopted the boy from the Hustons long ago."

"Thank you, Mr. Bogard." She said it in a tiny flat voice.

"In fifteen minutes," I heard myself saying.

When I put the receiver down I remembered that I hadn't told her about the Hustons lying dead in their little farmhouse. I was glad I hadn't told her.

I splashed cold water over my face and hair, drank another cup of coffee and turned the gas out under the percolator in the kitchenette. Then I went down to get my car.

She was waiting on the front step of the Lansdon. There were still a few people sitting around after the rain, but because it was cooler now most of the families had gone to bed.

I turned the car around and she got in, sitting composedly. She had a light coat over a pale blue dress and in the dimness it was easy to see her the way she looked long ago when her heart was young and warm. Maybe it still was. She had the kind of poise you can get only by coming to terms with life. I knew she had done that. Because I knew that I understood what it must mean to her to take a ride back into the past. Maybe it wasn't going to work out. Uh-huh! maybe you should stick to guns and clues, Bogard. Too late now.

Manhattan was behind us when I said, not looking at her: "You didn't tell me about that ad you put in the morning papers."

I could see her face turn a little toward me. "No," she said. "Should I have? It didn't seem important."

"Anyone answer it, Mrs. Farland?"

She drew her coat collar higher round her throat because a little air was blowing into the convertible. "Only one person. By telephone. He said his name was Gelder."

I felt my hands go tight on the big steering-wheel and my foot eased off the pedal. I said: "What happened?"

SHE was looking at me hard now. "That name—Gelder—it means something to you, Mr. Bogard."

"Yeah." I said. "What did he say?"

"Not very much. When I explained what the background was he seemed to lose interest. He said the facts didn't match his circumstances and that he must have drawn a wrong conclusion from my advertisement."

"He hadn't," I said. "Go on."

"He said he was sorry to have troubled me. I told him it was all right and that I had, in any case, decided to consult a private investigator. He then said that I should be careful what kind of investigator I hired and that perhaps he could help because he knew several. I told him I was going to see you. . . ."

I could feel my mouth twist downward in the kind of grin that has nothing to do with amusement. "He would like that," I said.

"Why yes," she answered. "He said you had a good reputation, Mr. Bogard." She added, with a quick little smile: "Which suggests I wasn't wrong when I picked you out of the telephone book because I liked the sound of your name."

I drove a quarter-mile without speaking. I had a barely formulated theory. It was crazy, but maybe I should test it. I said: "You never saw him?"

"No. There was no point if his case was different, was there?"

I said slowly: "Maybe your ad was exactly what he expected." I could sense her body stiffening as I said it.

"What do you mean?" Her voice was dry and a little edgy.

I went on: "Had you ever heard his voice before?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so—but he was slightly indistinct. He apologized about that. He explained that he had a head cold."

"Yeah," I said, "he would have to have that if he was talking to you. . . ."

Thelma Farland reached out suddenly and grasped my arm. Her voice was low, urgent. "What are you trying to tell me, Mr. Bogard?"

I said: "For him there was always a chance that you might identify his voice even after almost a quarter of a century."

Her fingers were biting into my arm the way Cathy Marton's had done. I said bleakly: "Tell me what George Schilton looked like."

She took her hand away. It fluttered over the worn black bag she was holding in her lap. Then she had the catch open and slid something out of a compartment. She held a small photograph out so that I could see it while I drove.

I heard her saying: "I kept this photograph because it is the one I like best of myself. I always meant to cut him off it. Somehow I never did."

But I wasn't listening any more. I was staring down at a picture of a young girl wearing a bob and a Charleston dress. A very lovely girl who was Thelma Farland. I was also staring down at a picture of George Schilton who became Nick Gelder and who now called himself Leroy Kalda.

I knew everything now. There was nothing more to do except one thing. I had to play it right. I knew it was going to be tougher than any case I ever tangled with.

Tony Belligi was still on duty. He let us through without any preliminaries. He had had his orders from The House. The youngest butler in the world was still on duty. He called up a smile on his dark, deadly face. He had had his orders, too.

In two minutes I was walking back into James Caffrey Broekman's living room, seeing him rise slowly from his big chair, his wrists dangling a little below the starched white cuffs which stuck out below his old-style dinner coat.

I took Thelma Farland's arm in mine, led her gently up to him.

For a long minute they didn't speak. Then she said, in a calm little voice: "Why Jim, you've grown old."

He stood there looking at her, thinking of the dead years that could have been, not able to find any words.

I didn't belong there. I went very quickly from the room.

They didn't hear me.

Chapter XIV

IT WAS three o'clock in the morning. I drifted north on Broadway beyond Times Square. Still plenty of traffic. Plenty of people having fun. You having any fun, Bogard? Not yet. Maybe soon. Maybe.

I slewed round an intersection, parked the car four blocks down, walked back to the Great White Way. The little joint I went into had swing double-doors like an old-time Western saloon. There was sawdust on the floor and the bartender wore a cowboy shirt that had never been seen on any range. There was a big gilt-framed mirror behind his balding head with curved nudes on it. Pine tables dotted the floor and the waitresses wore blue jeans and fancy little riding boots. They didn't have Hollywood cowboy shirts. They had Bikini-style bras instead. They didn't wear anything else above the midriff because the management didn't allow it.

I could see the management standing in a side doorway. He was a rangy-looking character with a waxed mustache and a black cutaway jacket as worn by Western peace officers *circa* 1873. He had a cartridge belt and a stage prop gun which looked faintly like the single-action six-shooters which Sam Colt used to sell the Texas Rangers.

I leaned on the bar counter with both elbows and stared into the mirror. The bartender shifted his black cheroot from one side of his mouth to the other, then took it out and laid it on a near-bronze tray. The cheroot was splayed and wet where it had been in his mouth.

"What'll it be, pardner?"

I sighed.

"Tequila," I said.

His black-button eyes rounded.

"Huh?"

I grinned at him. "That's what they drink down along the Pecos, isn't it?"

He closed one eye, reached up a hand to the shelf behind him.

"Okay," I said, "you got Scotch?"

He slid a bottle and a glass along the counter and I spilled out a slug. I tipped the glass to my mouth, then slowly put it down. I had looked into the mirror again. Someone was coming up behind me. I had never seen him in my life but I knew who he was. I knew it because he was a big bony guy with the brightest red hair in New York. I also knew it the way you know things though you couldn't explain how you knew them even in a third degree session.

The clipped hairs on the nape of my neck began to stand up and tiny fingers played a sub-zero obbligato up and down my spine. He came straight up to the bar, leaned on it alongside me. I didn't turn. I drank the whiskey slowly until there was no more in the glass.

"You want another?" The bartender asked it with his eyes.

I nodded.

Redhead said: "Scotch for me, too, bub."

He had a harsh breathy voice pitched just too high for a big man and he was that. He stood at least six feet and had the most powerful bone structure I had ever seen but not much flesh. His face had the kind of pinky pigmentation you often see on redheaded men. There was a tiny white scar in the hollow of his right cheek. His eyes were flat and cold and luminous.

I slid a hand under my jacket and got the catch off my Luger without anyone seeing me. I said, not turning: "How's Nick?"

REDHEAD had his hand on his glass. I could see his long sharp fingers flex on it. There was a tinkle and the glass splintered under the pressure. Whiskey splashed over his hand, pooled on the bar top. He snatched his hand away.

I said: "Okay, brother—don't go for your rod. I'm holding one inside my coat. It's looking your way."

He stopped his hand, brought it back on to the counter, using his fingers to make little drumbeats. His voice was just a harsh rustle of sound when he spoke.

"Tell it, smart guy. Make it fast."

I made a half-turn, got him into full focus.

"I'm not a copper," I said in a low voice. "I'm not even going to call copper. Do we talk?"

He kept his flat eyes on me, didn't move.

"Maybe—maybe not. What's the spiel?"

"Nick Gelder," I said.

A look visited his dead-pan face, went away. It didn't tell me anything. It didn't have to. Suddenly, he shrugged. "Okay—what have I got to lose? Where do we talk?"

I jerked my head at an alcove table away from the lights.

"Okay," he said again. "Let's go."

We went across the bar abreast. No one was giving anything away. We put our hands on the table where we could see that they weren't getting ideas.

Redhead leaned across. "What about Nick Gelder?" he said. "And it had better be right."

I said: "Nick got rid of two sidemen, didn't he?"

He let his eyes half-close. He whispered: "You're talking dynamite, bub. You know that?"

I nodded. "It has to be that way. If you don't want to take a little ride."

I could just hear his voice. "I said to spill it, didn't I?"

"Yeah," I said. "I'm doing that. My way. You know all the guys work for Gelder?"

Suddenly, his flat eyes clouded. Just a little cloud. Like the first cloud on a clear sky. I knew I was playing it right. The way I should have played this case before. But I hadn't had a chance like this.

He said: "No—not all of them. Gelder uses a lotta guys."

"You haven't seen me around, for one, have you?"

He shook his head. Slowly. His eyes never left me.

I grinned faintly. "Nick's overstepping himself," I said. "Too many dead guys. I don't want that."

"What are you trying to tell me?" The words came out quickly. There were two high spots of color on his pink cheeks.

I leaned back, taking it slow and easy. I

knew I had him cold now.

"Nick hires guys to eliminate some people who get in his way. Then maybe he gets to wondering if they'll be standup men should the johns take them in for a session under the lights. You a standup man, Redhead?"

He tipped his long lips with his tongue. His eyes were as luminous as an alley cat's at midnight.

"It—it wasn't that way with . . ." He let the sentence die on him.

I said: "Nick got a Polynesian gunman to bump Louie Rizola. A guy named Don Nawahi. Nawahi went back to Chicago. The johns won't look for him there."

Now there were no high spots in his cheeks, no color anywhere on his face. A little saliva globule oozed out of the corner of his mouth.

"Yeah," he breathed. "That was the way of it. You must be high with Nick to know all that."

I stood up, looked down at him. "This time Nick is playing it a new way," I said softly. "He has a little phone talk with McNulty, a Homicide dick. A half-hour back. About you. On account of you've done your job and Nick gets jittery once again. That's all."

He stared up at me. His big bony hands were balled together like two hams.

"Thanks, pal. Thanks for telling me." His voice was hard and flat and toneless.

I said: "You got time to get out of town, Redhead. Better make it. Fast. This is the tipoff."

He went on staring at me, not saying anything. I got a Lucky into the corner of my mouth, fed a flame to it and drifted across the bar. I had my back to him all the way. It was wet when I got out on to the sidewalk.

THERE was a pay telephone booth at the corner. I got into it, pulled the door tight and dropped the appropriate coin in the slot.

"Police Headquarters." The voice was bored, routine.

"Homicide—Detective Lieutenant O'Cassidy," I said. I knew Cass was on all-night duty. I had known that when I strung Redhead along.

O'Cassidy's quiet dispassionate voice moved into my ear.

"Lo, Cass," I said softly. "Bogard talking to you."

"I'm listenin', Dale."

I spoke slowly, carefully into the mouthpiece.

"This is the payoff, Cass."

"Yeah," he said. "I thought it would be. I'm still listenin'."

I picked up. "This time it's different. I'm playing a hunch. I'm not wrong about it. But it could break wrong. Can you take a chance on that?"

His calm voice said. "I guess so. We're taking chances all the time on cases you never know about until you read them in the Five Star Final. No reason to include you out."

I said rapidly: "You want to take Kalda. This is one way. Maybe the only way. Kalda had Rizola and the junky killed. Maybe you don't get excited about those kind of killings —but you want Kalda, don't you?"

"Yeah," he said again. "I want Kalda."

"George and Anna Huston, an old couple who adopted the illegitimate son of James Caffrey Broekman and then handed the boy back to him, were murdered tonight. They lived out on a farm in New Jersey. A big redheaded loogan gave it to them. One of Kalda's toughies."

I could hear him send a dry whistle into the mouthpiece.

"You know a mug with a lot of bone and scarlet hair, Cass?"

"Yeah," he said, "I know him. George Nies. He goes around with a big thirty-eight. He has very powerful hands."

"Strangler's hands?"

"Could be, Dale. We can't prove it."

"I've just talked with him," I said very clearly.

Cass didn't speak. I went on: "I sold him a story that Kalda is all set to frame him with the Police Department. I told him to blow while there was time. He won't do that, Cass. I think I know where he will be heading. It'll take him maybe a half-hour to get there because he won't go until he is high enough to do what he thinks he has to do."

O'Cassidy's voice was hard and swift. "I get it. It's a chance. Just a chance, but I'll play it along with you."

"I'm going to Kalda's place now," I said. "Don't bust in when you get there. Find a quiet way in. There'll be talk. The kind of talk you want to hear. Then you can bust in —with guns."

"All right, Dale." He made a sound. "If it breaks the wrong way you'll be in a spot. You know that?"

"I know it," I said, "but I have to do it this way. I want Kalda more than you do. For very personal reasons."

I let the receiver slump back on its cradle and walked out into the night.

Chapter XV

THE house stood in a quiet block just off Central Park. It was a private house, and parked out front were the big lush cars of the suckers who played Kalda's tables and sometimes won. But not often. Kalda didn't hire croupiers who wouldn't have little trick wires run up the inside of their pants.

I went up the concrete steps and into the foyer. The lights shed the kind of subdued radiance which cancels out the hard lines on the faces of the women who live too fast, masks the fever in the hot eyes of the gamblers. The air was heavy with sandalwood, cigarettes, and dried sweat.

A tall slim boy with flat straw-colored hair and bright unwinking eyes took his square shoulders off a fluted column, moved toward me on the balls of his feet.

"Member?" He said it with a flash of beautiful white teeth. There was no smile in his eyes. There was nothing in his eyes.

I said evenly: "My name is Dale Bogard. I think Kalda will see me."

He wiped the smile off, moved his right hand a little, then stopped moving it.

"Yeah," he said. "He will."

He turned, went across the foyer, through the jammed roulette room, down a heavily-carpeted corridor. I kept three paces behind him. A door spanned the bottom of the corridor. A panel was let in the door. It had three colored buttons on it. He pressed the green one. There was a pause, then the door slid into the wall.

The blond boy gave me his grin.

"You're here," he said. "Goodbye, pal."

I went on into the room. The door slid almost soundlessly to behind me. It was a big room. The rose-colored pile lapped the ivory of the walls. The furniture was functional, modern and expensive. It was set out the way it would be in a display window. There was a white cocktail cabinet stacked with crystal glassware and colored bottles. There were six soft chairs, a white filing cabinet which ran the length of one of the walls, and a polished white desk.

Leroy Kalda or Nick Gelder or George Schilton sat behind the desk in a high-backed chair built out of pure transparent glass. He wore a white mess jacket. He wore a shirt with a cutaway collar and the kind of bowtie musicians wear at work. His iron-gray hair was beautifully pomaded and his nails had a silver lacquer sheen.

He was holding a .25 automatic with some beautifully-contrived filigree work on the ivory handle.

The muzzle was aimed at the lower region of the Bogard stomach.

"Good evening, Mr. Bogard." His voice was soft and caressing and deadly.

I stepped across the room. Leaned against the side of the desk. His gun swiveled around to keep me in focus.

"I can shoot you in the guts very swiftly, Mr. Bogard. Please do not hurry me into it." He purred the words.

I grinned down at him. "Your hired toughie with the blond hair isn't so smart—he let me keep my gun," I said. "You should do something about that—Mr. Schilton."

His eyes snapped and some color came and went in his heavy face.

"You are well informed, my friend," he said. As he said it he pressed a table button. A big man with thinning hair slicked back over his bald pate came in. He came through a Spanish-style archway on my right. I could see the foot of a wide staircase.

He stood in the doorway, swinging his arms in a little rhythmical swing, from side to side.

Kalda said: "Unrod the gumshoe, Maxie."

The hood moved in behind me. He took my gun away, frisked me again. He was through. He tested for a leg-holster.

"Nuttin' else," he said.

KALDA got up, came around from behind his desk. He was smiling. He brought his fist up suddenly, hit me high up on the cheek bone with his big showy ring. I could taste the salt tang of blood in my mouth. A little of it spilled over onto my chin.

"You have given me trouble, Mr. Bogard," he said. "There will be a lot more to come."

Maxie grinned. There were three gaps in his front set. "You want I should work on him, Nick?" He licked his lips as he said it.

Kalda went on smiling. "Not yet, Maxie. In a little while. I will call you."

The gorilla went away and I got my white show handkerchief out, wiped the blood off my mouth.

Kalda said: "Sit down, Mr. Bogard. We have a little talk due."

He went back behind his desk. I sat on the edge of its polished wasteland. There was a little electric clock set in the wall just above his head. It told me I had given O'Cassidy all the time he needed. I didn't have to take any more from Leroy Kalda.

I said: "You read Thelma Farland's ad. You knew Larry Broekman on account of he loses a lot of dough at your crooked tables. Then you started playing around with his nymphomaniac sister. She'll fall even for a middle-aged cheapskate like you, won't she?"

His eyes glittered, but he said: "Go on, Bogard, while you have the chance."

"You knew the Broekmans from way back. I mean you knew James Caffrey Broekman. You robbed him of Thelma Farland because that was the way his family wanted it. Then, suddenly, twenty-five years later, the past started coming back to life. When you read that ad, you saw the chance of a reconciliation between Thelma Farland and Broekman. And Broekman is many times a millionaire. You could see limitless blackmail. *All you had to do was to hold out the threat that you'd claim Larry Broekman was your son.* That was how you were going to play it with Thelma Farland. Only you found out that she was going to consult a private eye. So you sent Louie Rizola to throw a scare into me. It didn't work.

"Then you had Rizola killed because you no longer trusted him—and then you tried to frame me for it. Don Nawahi, a gunman you hired when you were Nick Gelder in Chicago, gave it to Louie—and George Nies rubbed out that junky kid who ran around with Louie. Only this time he used copper wire and his big hands."

"A beautiful theory, my friend. Just how are you going to prove it? You—"

He broke off suddenly, darted his eyes toward a small paneled door on his left. It was moving. Kalda got up, backed away waving his gun to cover everything.

The door moved outward. Lola Broekman came through it.

She said, in a deadly calm voice: "I heard it, Roy."

Kalda stared at her, his mouth working, his breathing audible.

"What the hell are you doing here?" His voice was moving harshly up the scale.

Lola Broekman said: "Larry's in there, too. He's drunk. The way he always is. I took him in there to sober up. You weren't around. Too bad you weren't around. For you, Roy."

Kalda made a little laugh in his throat.

"You didn't hear me admit any of Bogard's fantasies, my dear Lola," he said softly.

"Are they fantasies?" She said it in an ice-cold voice and it wasn't a question. "I tried to buy Bogard off because I didn't want a stepmother moving in on the Broekman millions. But you—"

SOMETHING not pleasant looked out of Kalda's eyes. He was going to say something. But he never made it.

George Nies came through the Spanish archway. He stood there swaying gently on his heels and toes. An unbelted gabardine coat swung loosely open. His hat was pushed far back on his flaming hair. His right hand jutted forward. It held a huge eight-inch Colt with the front sight filed off. He held the hammer back under his thumb.

"This is it, Nick," he said.

Kalda spun sideways, his elegant automatic sliding across the big desk.

George Nies went on: "You ain't giving it to me the way we did them punk killers. You got a better idea. Too bad I got wise, Nick."

Kalda stared out of his suddenly ashen face. Words struggled from him: "How did you get in here? Where's Maxie?"

George Nies jeered at him. "I put a little coiled wire around his neck just like I did to the junky, Nick. I killed the Hustons tonight, Nick, too. For you. For two grand. They were just an old couple living in the sticks. I didn't like killing them." A tiny smile twisted his face. "I'll like killing you, Nick," he whispered.

He brought the gun high up, squinted along it, thumbing the hammer far back. Kalda's eyes were frozen.

"Don't shoot, George. Don't do it. You got it all wrong. I'm not putting you on any spot. I—I—" The words ended in a babble.

George Nies grinned along the gun.

"You're yellow, too," he said. "Goodbye, yellow—"

There was a sudden cracking noise. Not a gun explosion. Larry Broekman staggered through the little door, fell to the floor.

George Nies jumped violently. Kalda slid down behind the desk, clawing at his gun. He came out around the side of the desk, low down, aiming. There was a spurt of flame, a short snapping bark. George Nies swayed back, slid down into one of the upholstered chairs.

Kalda moved out swiftly from the table, stood in front of him. The little automatic jumped in his hand, kept on jumping. He fired five more slugs into George Nies.

Lola Broekman stood very still, beyond speech. Larry Broekman groaned, crawled across the carpet. Kalda backed into the archway. He had the dead hood's Colt now.

When he spoke it was with a voice no one had ever heard before. "Don't move. Don't do anything. I don't mind killing any of you now."

I went on standing there, wondering what had held O'Cassidy.

Then Larry Broekman twisted sideways on the floor. I saw a little blue gun jump into his hand. I knew that Kalda had seen it, too. There were two shots. Larry Broekman lay very still.

Kalda's eyes were half-closed and mad.

"One more for Bogard," he whispered.

He brought the Colt up as I had seen George Nies do it. I could feel the sweat clammy against the small of my back and there was a sound in my ears. Like the sound of a gun fired far away. It seemed to come from high up.

Then I saw Kalda's huge gun spin from his hands, thud onto the heavy carpet. His legs folded. He was already dead when he hit the floor.

I went through the arch, looked up the Spanish stairway. Patty Amando was walking down the stairs. She carried a .38 police gun down at her side. I remembered it.

"I owed him that—personally," she said.

O'Cassidy walked down the stairs behind her. He was carrying the service revolver he hadn't had to use.

IT WAS three o'clock in the afternoon when I woke up. There was a letter for me. Bella must have tiptoed in and put it on my bedside table. It said, very simply: *Thank you for everything, Bogard.—James Caffrey Broekman.* There was a check clipped to the note. It was for five thousand dollars.

The telephone rang. I got out of bed, padded into my living room. It was Thelma Farland. There was a catch in her voice. I understood why.

"I had to speak to you," she said. "About Larry. I never met him after all."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"But he died bravely," she said. "I'll try to remember that. Always."

I held the phone to my ear for a long time. I didn't speak. There was nothing to say. I heard the little click as she hung up.

Then I padded back into my little room, sat on the edge of the bed. I got out the certificate of death I had taken from the Hustons' bureau. The one the Hustons had erased and changed because they wanted their own son to have his chance in life. I heard myself speaking. Softly. The way you speak to the dead.

"Goodbye, little Larry," I said. "She never knew. She never will know now. Let her keep her dream."

I went into the bathroom, showered and shaved. I was going to see Patty Amando. I always pay my debts. . . . • • •

CROOKS ARE THE CRAZIEST PEOPLE

A SEATTLE, WASH., man was arrested for stealing $550 and spending $220 for an engagement ring, $23.50 for a guitar and $116 for a love seat.

A MANILA PROPHET was thrown into jail because he prophesied that the world was about to come to an end and it didn't.

A PORTERVILLE, CALIF., man was hauled to the hoosegow because he became so mad at his reluctant car that he got a rifle and began shooting it up.

A THIEF stole a 35-foot-high oak tree from in front of a Walpole, Mass., dwelling. The oak was dug up by the roots and carted away.

AFTER SHOOTING her husband, a Richmond, Ind., woman told police: "The most pleasure I ever had in my life was seeing him fall to the floor."

FIREMEN of Engine Company 48, Chicago, have a pretty good idea why someone turned in that false alarm they rushed to. When they returned, their $500 television set was gone.

A ST. LOUIS burglar didn't have any trouble robbing the Cherry Blossom Co. safe of $20 in petty cash. He merely read a sign giving exact directions on how to open the strongbox. The firm put up the sign years before after the safe had been badly damaged by a burglar's effort to force it open.

THE CONGREGATIONALIST choir at Lake Geneva, Wis., sang "Take My Life And Let It Be," as a thief rifled four purses in the coatroom, netting $82.

A SEVENTY-YEAR-OLD lady was carted off to court in Amarillo, Tex., for stealing seven tricycles.

A MIAMI professor raised so much havoc when he discovered that his wife had increased the Pablum content of the baby's formula that it cost him $450—his fine for disturbing the peace with profane language, assaulting a policeman, resisting arrest and obstructing an officer.

A LIEUTENANT COMMANDER in New York was put in the brig because he became so peeved when a couple of guests were reluctant to leave his daughter's wedding reception, asking for more food and drink instead, that he got out his trusty gun and began firing in their direction.

A CHEYENNE, WYO., man was given a talking to by authorities because he tore off his wife's clothes, took all her money and left her naked on a street.

A 17-YEAR-OLD Roanoke, Va., youth was hauled off to jail for possessing—three wives!

—Cellblock Sam

MURDER With ONIONS

Eddie came out of stir determined to play it straight, but easy money spelled trouble—and so did a girl. . . .

YOU don't have any friends, Eddie Donohue, they told him. You don't have any family; you don't have any home. You're a bum and a fool and you'll spend the rest of your life in jail. You don't have a chance.

For six years they told Eddie Donohue that. Then they put him in a bus and dumped him in the middle of the big city and left him. And he laughed.

He stood on the corner and laughed at the bus as it pulled away. The summer breeze whipped the new blue cuffs of the new blue suit around his ankles, and in his pocket the ten-dollar bill was crisp and crinkly. The world was ahead of him, a bright, new, free world. Friends, family, home? Why, his name was Donohue. He'd show 'em.

And then, because his name was Donohue, he went direct to Fatso's.

Sure, he was going to play it straight; the only way to stay out was to play it straight. Sure, his old friends had been a bad influence. Sure, he had a job to find. But it wouldn't hurt to drop in at Fatso's and see the old gang again—just once—would it?

So Eddie Donohue, fresh out of stir, went to Fatso's grubby tavern again.

Fatso was still there, behind the bar, his face still puffed, his eyes still tiny and black. But that was all. The two men at the bar were strangers.

Eddie Donohue put his ten on the bar and said, "A beer, Fatso. How's the boy?"

Unblinking, Fatso stared at him. He didn't move an inch; he didn't crack his face.

"Gimme a beer," Eddie said. "What's the matter with you?"

Fatso pushed the ten back toward him. "Stir money," he said. "Keep it."

Red rage blazed inside Eddie Donohue. He crumpled the ten in his fist, knuckles white. He glared at Fatso; he looked from one of the strangers to the other. No one moved; no one made a sound. And Eddie Donohue, the boy who wanted to play it straight, walked away from the bar.

He was almost outside, the ten burning a hole in his pocket now, when Al came in. The same old Al. Dapper, smooth, oily Al. The operator.

"Eddie Donohue!" he cried. "How are you, boy?" He put his arm around Eddie's shoulders and brought him back to the bar. "How's the boy, Eddie?" he said. "Have a drink! Give him a drink, Fatso."

Al, still the operator.

So they had a drink, and Al said, "How long have you been around?" and "What are you going to do?" and then he took a bill out of his pocket.

It was a twenty. A fat, juicy twenty, folded lengthwise the way a dice shooter folds it. The first twenty Eddie'd seen in six hungry years.

"This is on me, kid," Al said. "Sort of a

celebration." He laid the twenty carefully on the bar and Fatso filled the glasses again. "Handsome, ain't it?" Al said.

He meant the twenty. Strangely, Eddie's throat was dry again, drier than it had ever been.

"There's a lot of 'em around, Eddie," Al said. "Just waiting for somebody to pick 'em up."

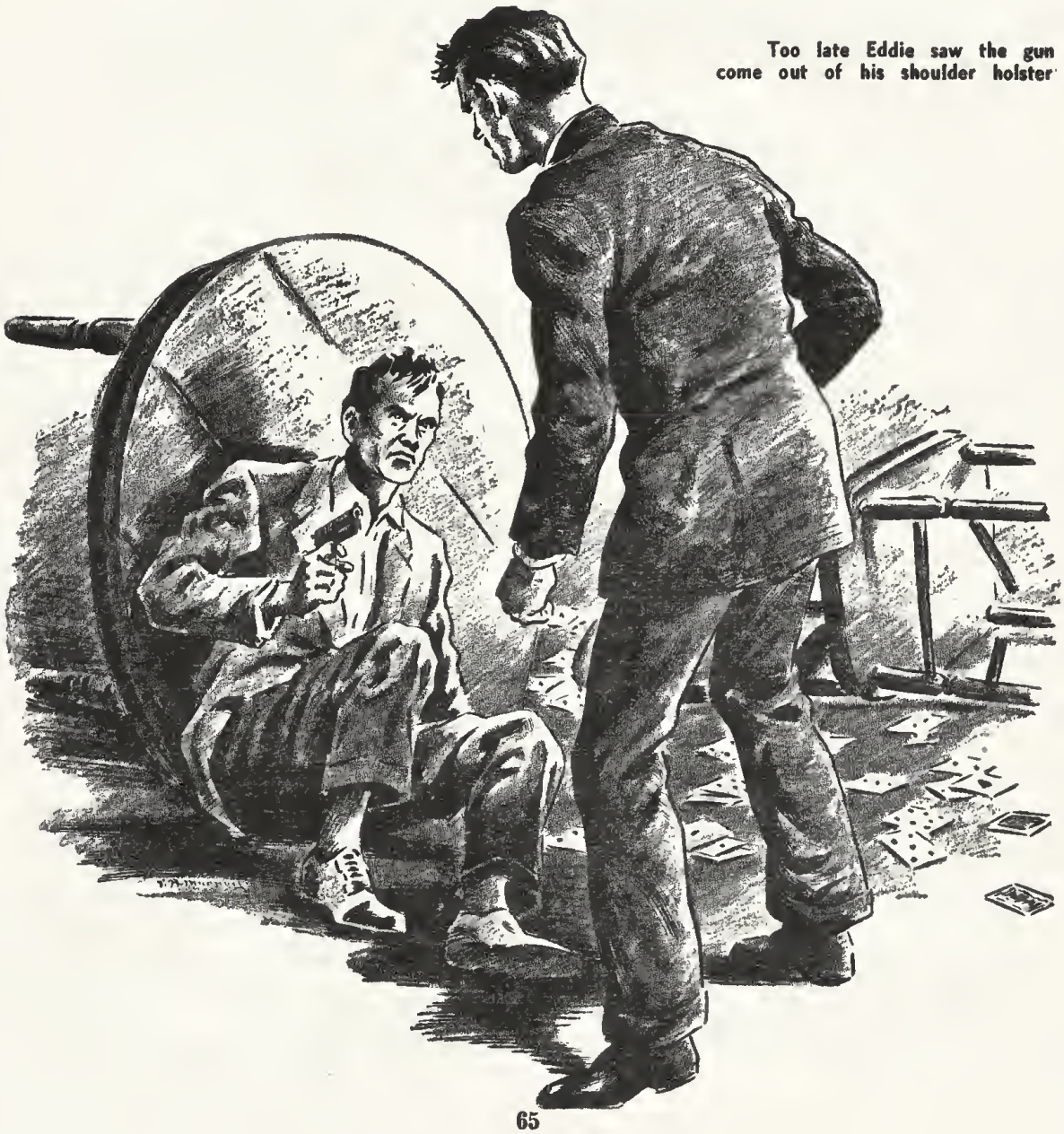
Carefully, Eddie said, "Let 'em wait."

Al held his beer glass to the light, inspecting it. "Sure. Sure, kid. No hurry. Tomorrow, next week, next month."

"Not any month," said Eddie.

"Sure," Al said. "You know where to find me, kid. Any time you need a connection—"

OUTSIDE, Eddie moved rapidly down the street. He had a destination now. He



Too late Eddie saw the gun come out of his shoulder holster

wanted that job fast, that solid feeling beneath his feet, that security. He wanted to be sure he wasn't going back.

Around the corner he went and down the street and then up to the house. From the outside it was just like it had been. But some things had changed, Eddie saw when the door opened in answer to his ring.

Take a gangly, skinny girl of sixteen. Six years could change her. Round her out, pad her, put lipstick on those full lips and a tight blouse, skin tight, on her blooming figure. It could take the innocence out of her eyes and make them wild and predatory. All that, and all it meant, in six years.

She recognized him, of course. She said, "Why, Eddie! Eddie Donohue!"

"I want to see your father," Eddie told her stolidly.

"He's busy. But come on in and talk to me."

"I'll—maybe I'd better come back," Eddie said.

"Don't be silly!" She took his arm and led him into the big front room. "It's nice to see you, Eddie."

Eddie said. "Yeah."

"Sit down, Eddie. What are you afraid of?"

Eddie sat down, very gently. "I'm not afraid."

Close to him, she smiled. "Yes you are. You're afraid of me, aren't you?"

"Why should I be afraid of you?" Eddie asked.

But he was. Afraid of her and of himself. Of six years' pent-up dreams. Of this ripe, luscious girl who was a woman now.

She knew it, too. Her lips were half parted, her wild eyes wilder, her blouse rising and falling as she breathed.

She was sitting like that, on the sofa close to him, when Mylin came in.

Mylin. Big now, with an important stomach, hair gray at the temples and his face pudgy and soft. His eyes were as they'd always been—wild like his daughter's, but harder, like little buttons he could see with but which brought him no feeling or understanding.

He had a cigar in his mouth and he glared first at Eddie, then at the girl. He jerked a thumb toward the door and addressed the girl.

"Git!" he said.

She rose slowly.

"Git!" he said again.

She left the room.

Then Mylin took the cigar from his mouth. Staring at the wet end, he said, "Get this, Donohue, and don't forget it. Stay away from my daughter. Don't ever let me catch you with her." They were hard, violent words, the way Mylin said them.

Slowly Eddie replied, "I didn't come here to see her."

Mylin put the cigar back in his mouth. "I don't owe you nothing, Donohue. And I don't want you around here."

Eddie flushed. He got slowly to his feet.

"All I want," he said, "is a job. Any job. Washing cars, fixing flats. Anything. You're on the legit now; so am I. Give me a chance."

"You had your chance, kid," Mylin said. "I don't want you around me. See?"

His fists clenched, Eddie could see only Mylin's round, pudgy face. He said slowly, "I could tell a good story."

Mylin waved the cigar toward the door. "Go ahead. Nobody's going to listen to you; you're a punk. Now git—and don't come back."

Darkness had come when Eddie reached the sidewalk again. The darkness of a long and beckoning night. A darkness that covered the rich and the poor alike, that clothed the ex-convict in the same black other men wore. A darkness that brought terror to some, riches to others.

EDDIE walked alone through that darkness. So I'm out now, he thought. So I'm out, and Mylin gets fat. A month from now, six months, maybe a year, I'll be back in again, and Mylin will be bigger and fatter and nastier. Play it straight, Eddie. Sure!

Then a car was at the curb beside him and he heard a voice: "Eddie! Get in!"

He whirled. It was Joe Murphy, with the sergeant's stripes new on his sleeve and a squad car under him. "Get in, Eddie," he said again.

"Whaddaya want?" Eddie blazed. "I ain't

done nothing!"

"Get in, Eddie," Joe Murphy said.

So Eddie got in.

For half a mile they drove before Eddie said. "What do ya want?"

"Just some talk, Eddie," Joe Murphy said.

"I got nothing to talk about."

Another block and Murphy said, "You were up to see Mylin. Right?"

Eddie didn't answer.

"Things have changed, Eddie."

Still Eddie didn't answer.

"He's respectable now, Eddie."

"All I got to do," Eddie said slowly, "is open my yap."

Joe Murphy sighed. "Sure. Go ahead, talk. You're a punk kid; he's big. Who's going to listen?"

"I clouted the car," Eddie said. "Just one car—and I took my medicine. But not him. I didn't clout any papers with it, copper, and he didn't ask for papers. Where did he get the title when he peddled it again?"

"You couldn't prove it, Eddie," Murphy told him. "You're just a punk kid with a grudge."

They drove on, Murphy quiet and taking it easy, the youth beside him still feverish with rage, fists still clenched, riding aimlessly on the city streets.

At last they pulled in beside the little restaurant.

"Kid," Murphy said, "you were a short-order cook once. Remember?"

It was the sort of place that would be called a diner on the outskirts of town, long and narrow, with a row of booths and a counter, a grill between two coffee urns behind the counter. A little fellow with a big nose and light blue eyes was twisting dials on the coffee urns.

"Shorty," Joe Murphy said, "you still looking for a short-order man?"

Shorty turned around. His grin was as friendly as his freckled face.

"Sure," he said. "How about it, kid? Had any experience?"

It was a clean place, gleaming—the counter a startling white, the floor mopped and glistening—warm and peaceful and inviting.

Eddie said, "I been out of touch for six years."

Shorty pulled off his apron. "Give it a try. Fix up four hamburgers."

Eddie fried the hamburgers. They were dried out, overcooked, when he served them.

"You'll catch on," Shorty said. "You can handle it."

"I dunno," Eddie said glumly.

"Sure you can. Fifty a week and food. Now you and Murphy eat them hamburgers and you get behind that counter."

That night, Eddie had a job. For a stinking, lousy, measly fifty a week, while a slob like Mylin grew big and fat.

They worked until two in the morning, Shorty and Eddie alone, making hamburgers, pouring coffee. Twice Eddie burned the meat; once he slopped a cup of coffee all over the place.

"You'll get onto it," Shorty said.

They closed at two, and Eddie watched as Shorty emptied the till. A hundred in there, he figured. An easy hundred. Twice what he'd be paid every week.

"Five o'clock tomorrow," Shorty told him. "That's when the day man goes off."

Eddie found a hotel room. He slept until eleven and he had to go out and buy a razor when he awoke. He had one shirt, one suit of underwear, one pair of socks. When he walked into the diner, the ten was down to less than six.

The diner wasn't the same that afternoon. They weren't alone, he and Shorty. As he entered, Shorty called him over.

"Eddie," he said, "this is Lois. My wife. She hops tables and she'll give you a rough time."

She was nice-looking, with capable, big hands and big forearms. She grinned at Eddie's appraising look and said, "Just keep your eyes on the hamburgers and we'll get along, boy. Okay?"

AFTER six o'clock, Eddie couldn't take his eyes off the hamburgers. The diner crowd came in then. Lois hopped tables and yelled orders at him; Shorty worked the counter and yelled orders at him. Every order brought a *zing* on the cash register. The dollar plate—*zing!* Hamburger—*zing!* Pie and coffee—*zing! Zing, zing, zing!* A hundred? This was worth two, three hun-

dred easy. Every night.

Eddie didn't know how many orders Lois and Shorty had to repeat, how many hamburgers he burned, how many fell apart on him. Somehow he got through the rush, and then it was eight o'clock. Lois came around in front of the counter in a street dress.

"You did all right, kid," she told him. "We'll get along."

After she left, Shorty and Eddie worked the long, slow hours and the merry *zing, zing, zing* died to an occasional whisper. The drifters came in, the drunks and late dates, the old men with bleary eyes and pockmarked faces—and sometimes the cash register didn't *zing* at all.

"That boy's had a rough time," Shorty would say. Or, "We'll give the old man a break, kid; this one's on the house."

But it was there when they closed up—all that long green—just waiting for somebody to pick it up.

That was Tuesday. Wednesday, Eddie's ten was down to a deuce. Lois grinned when he came in. As the rush started she told him, "Keep 'em straight tonight, buddy. Take it easy." Shorty said, "You'll catch on. Don't worry."

He listened to the orders Wednesday but the *zing* of the cash register was still in the background. The long green was still there, just waiting.

Thursday he watched it grow and heard it grow. And Friday. And Saturday—with a slim two bits in his pocket—Saturday was pay day.

Shorty shoved the money into his hand. "You're off tomorrow, kid," he said.

A measly fifty bucks, minus deductions. Not fat, lush twenties you folded lengthwise for a bar or a dice table. Hard money, money you hung onto. Money that bought respectability, but not much else.

Saturday night he watched as Shorty took that long green out of the drawer and counted it.

"Shorty," he said, "you always take that cash home with you?"

"No, sir," Shorty replied. "There's a bank around the corner and it goes into the night depository. Here, I'll show you."

He filled out the bank envelope, stuffed the money into it, showed Eddie how much to leave for morning, how to fill out a duplicate ticket.

"If you ever close up, kid," he said, "do it this way, see? Then lock the door and keep the key. I've got an extra."

"Yeah, sure, Shorty," he said.

It was easy. Too easy.

Sunday, his day off, Eddie took a streetcar ride, out to the North Side, away from the diner and the long green there. Away from Al.

Because always in the back of his mind was the thought of Al. Al would find out; he'd know Eddie had a soft touch set up. He'd be around to collect on it. To change that green from pay-day money to soft money—fat, lush twenties. The kind of easy money he always carried.

Sooner or later Al would come around. So why wait? Why cut Al in?

Monday came, and Tuesday, and Wednesday, and still he waited, still he listened to the *zing* of the cash register and thought of that long green. It was too easy, too simple. Friday would be the night. Friday was a big day; Saturday was bigger but the help was paid out of Saturday's take.

Then at nine o'clock Wednesday, Shorty came up to him.

"Take over, kid," he said. "I'm going home to bed. I'm sick."

"Take over?" Eddie asked. "Me?"

Shorty put his hand on Eddie's shoulder. "Sure," he said. "You. Why not?"

FIVE minutes later, there he was, Eddie Donohue, alone in the joint. With all that long green just waiting for him. All alone.

A customer came in, and Eddie served him and rang up his two bits. With the drawer open, he tried to estimate the number of tens but he couldn't. When the customer had left he riffled through them.

Twenty-three. More than two and a half in that drawer. Just put it in the envelope, Eddie, and leave the envelope in your pocket and keep moving. You've got ten hours, maybe more, before Shorty finds out, before the cops are on your trail.

He slammed the drawer shut. Somehow, even before he turned around, he knew that

he'd find Al at the counter. Smiling, dapper, greasy, self-confident Al.

"How much, Eddie?" Al asked.

Eddie walked along behind the counter until he was opposite Al, close enough to slap his face.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Al said, "Maybe I'm hungry. Maybe I been casing the joint ever since I heard you were working here, and I just waited till you were alone."

"What do you want?"

"What do you think, Eddie? There's a lot of it in that drawer, isn't there? Just waiting."

Eddie walked over to the cash register. The telephone was on the wall next to it; he took the receiver off the hook, dialed "O."

"I don't get it, boy," Al said.

"You'll have to plug me, Al."

The operator said, "Operator."

"I don't get it," Al said. "If this joint gets clouted, the law knows your record. You ain't got a chance. You might as well figure in the split."

"Operator!" said the voice over the phone.

Al said, "I don't get it, boy."

"It's up to you, Al. What do I tell her?"

The expression on Al's face didn't change; the steady gaze of his eyes didn't falter. He shrugged imperceptibly and said, "If you figure on cutting me out of this, you're making a mistake, boy." Then he walked out.

Eddie hung up and leaned against the wall. His stomach was quivering, his hands were moist, and he was angry.

What was the matter with Shorty, he asked himself. Why was the lug so simple? Why did he leave it there, just waiting to be picked up? Why did he have to get sick and shove Eddie in front of that loaded cash register, pockets empty and six years of hate and planning behind him?

It wasn't fair. Because now he wouldn't take it. He couldn't. Shorty had seen to that, and somehow it made Shorty unfair.

That night he locked up at two, counted the money, put it in the envelope, dropped the envelope in the night depository. Then he went to his room and slept.

Thursday, Shorty didn't show up, and Lois stayed until almost ten to help.

"He's a sick boy, Shorty is," she said. "He ought to take a month off."

"Sure," said Eddie.

"I figure," she said, "with you here, maybe he can."

"Me?"

"Sure. You're all right, Eddie. You and me—we can run this place by ourselves, can't we?"

Thursday night they did. Again Eddie locked up, again he reached the depository with the envelope, dropped it in. Friday was next, the big night. The night when any smart operator would hit a restaurant. The night to watch out for because Al would be back. Al was a smart operator, and he knew that Eddie was there to take the rap.

Friday Shorty was at work again, peaked and pale, but grinning.

"You did good, kid," he said. "Thanks. I'll be all right now."

That night the rush was bigger than ever. But Eddie wasn't listening to the cash register. He was watching out the window instead, looking for a shadow across the street, a car parked overlong, the glow of a cigarette where no human was visible. He was listening, as the evening wore on, for the sound of the door opening, the tip-toe of suede shoes on the floor.

BUT for all his listening, he didn't hear it and he almost dropped the coffee cup in his hand when the voice behind him said, "Hello, Eddie."

It wasn't Al, or any of the boys. It was a girl, alone at the counter, with a low-cut gown instead of a tight blouse, bright lipstick, bright rouge and bright, beady eyes. Too bright.

"Hello," she said. "Remember me, Eddie?"

"Sure," Eddie said. "What'll you have?"

"Don't you want to talk to me, Eddie? My father isn't around now."

"No, I guess he isn't," Eddie said. "What'll you have?"

She'd been drinking. "Nobody wants to talk to me," she said. "My old man watches me like I was the family jewels, and nobody talks to me."

Eddie poured a cup of black, strong coffee and placed it in front of her. "You've had too much," he said. "Take this."

She spooned sugar into it until the coffee slopped over into the saucer. "Maybe I have," she said. "But nobody wants to talk to me."

She smiled at Eddie. "My old man's at one of his stinking meetings and he thinks I'm home in bed." She giggled. "He thinks I'm on the wagon. He'll never know. What time do you get off, Eddie?"

Then, suddenly, she slumped to the floor, slowly, almost gracefully, and lay there, propped up against the stools.

Shorty came over and he and Eddie lifted her up and put her in one of the booths, smoothing her skirt out and pulling it down over the white of her legs.

"A friend of yours?" Shorty asked.

Eddie said, "I know who she is."

"Why don't you take her home?" Shorty asked. "I want to lock up early tonight, anyway."

"No," said Eddie. "I better stay with you."

"I'm all right. I can make it. Go ahead, call a cab and take her home. I'll stake you to the fare."

Stubbornly, Eddie said, "I'd better hang around here."

"What for?"

Yeah, what for, Eddie? What are you going to tell him—that he might be held up? That one of your pals might stick him up? That you might be in on it?

"Go ahead," Shorty said. "Take her home. I'll flag down a cab for you."

He stepped out of the door, to the curb, and there was nothing else to do. Take her home. Put her to bed and hope her old man wasn't there.

In the cab, with its windows open, her head on Eddie's shoulder, she revived a bit and giggled.

"Kiss me, Eddie," she said. She put her arms around his neck and drew his head down until their lips met. Hers were warm and moist and young, and Eddie remembered the words scribbled on the cell wall and the hoarse, feverish stories he'd heard for six years.

Then she giggled once more. "My old man would beat me if he knew," she said. "Look."

She pulled her dress off one shoulder, revealing its thin white sharpness, and in the flashes from the street-lights, she pointed to a bruise far down on her chest.

"That's from when he hit me," she said. "I wouldn't tell him where I've been tonight if I died."

She was suddenly conscious of the nakedness of her shoulder and once more she giggled. "Kiss me again, Eddie," she said.

But she fell asleep then and there, and Eddie put her dress back in place. In her purse he found the house key and he opened the door, carried her upstairs, put her on a bed, removed her shoes and stockings.

He shook her shoulders, and she stirred. She opened her eyes and smiled at him.

"Kiss me, Eddie," she said.

"How did you get that bruise?" he asked her.

"Fell," she said. "In the bar. Kiss me, Eddie."

ON HER dressing table a clock showed that it was 12:45. The girl closed her eyes again, and Eddie went out and walked along the darkened sidewalk. Maybe, he thought, Shorty had a few late customers. Maybe he wasn't able to close early. Eddie stretched his long legs and hurried.

It would be easy, he knew, to pay Mylin back for those six years, to bring new circles under those black eyes, new memories of pain.

But he knew, too, that he wouldn't. Mylin was repaid already for all the damage he could have done to any man. The slate was wiped off. The grill was clean, ready for the next order. Mylin was part of a life that was gone now.

A new life was waiting for Eddie—if he weren't too late. Only four blocks ahead.

Eddie had covered two of those blocks when he heard the whine of the police sirens in the distance. Second by second they were coming closer, growing ominous and frightening. He drew back in the shadows and waited until the squad car had gone by, instinctively unwilling to be seen by the police

or be closer to them than he could help.

He was only one block from Shorty's when he saw where the police car had stopped. In front of the bank. Only ten feet from the night depository.

He knew then what he'd find there. He knew why the police car had rushed up, why a dozen people already had gathered in a small circle on the sidewalk. He knew who would be in the center of that circle, lying crumpled on the cold cement in his own warm blood.

He ran and he shoved his way through the crowd. Shorty was lying on his face, a pitiful heap, legs drawn up, arms half outstretched, one hand still clutching the envelope that now was empty.

Eddie was sick to his stomach. His legs gave out suddenly, and he wanted to sit down, clutch at his throat, push the crowd away from him and away from Shorty, strike out against someone.

Against one person. The one who was behind this.

Like a man in a dream, he walked away. As if he were detached from himself, he could see Eddie Donohue move back through the crowd, edge along the walk past the police car, step out into the street. He could see himself hurry down the street, around the corner, walking rapidly but not too rapidly, hugging the shadows as a mouse hugs the woodwork. Squad cars would be prowling the neighborhood. He didn't want to be picked up now. Not for another half hour, and then it wouldn't matter.

A block away he saw one of those cars, and he stepped into the gloom of a doorway. Slowly it came on, its spotlight searching the blackness, flicking gently and softly past him and moving on.

Minutes later he was at Fatso's, circling it warily and moving around to the back. The bar was still lighted, a half dozen men lounging against it. He ignored them and went to the rear and up the outside stairway to the second floor he had been in six years before. Too often.

The stairs creaked and groaned as he went up, the door opened softly to his touch, and he was in the room, facing Al across a table with a game of solitaire laid out on it.

"Hello, Eddie," Al said. "Sit down."

So he sat down, facing Al, with his back to the door.

"You're out kind of late, aren't you, Eddie?" Al asked.

"Yeah," he said.

"It isn't a good night to be out, Eddie."

He said, "I came here for my cut, Al."

"What cut?"

"Ten per cent. About thirty bucks."

Al put down the cards he'd been holding in his right hand. "Eddie," he said, "you're hot. Every cop in the city will be looking for you. I don't need you any more, Eddie. I don't even want you around."

"What about my cut?"

"You didn't earn it, Eddie."

Careful, Eddie said, "Why did you have to kill him, Al?"

Al picked up the cards again. "I don't know what you're talking about, boy. I didn't kill anybody. You're the ex-con, Eddie, not me. You're the boy the cops will be looking for. Got a good alibi, Eddie?"

An alibi? Eddie didn't have any alibi except the word of a drunken girl.

"You're the patsy, Eddie," Al said. "For nothing."

EDDIE was sitting about four feet from the table. With one sweeping motion he reached out, put his hands under the table top and dumped the whole thing onto Al, cards and all.

Then he leaped over the table, his fingers outstretched and groping. He scraped a shin on the edge of the table and tumbled on top of the cards and the table and Al, too, under it. Too late he saw Al's hand dart for his shoulder holster. A blinding flame burst in Eddie's face, the roar of a gunshot rang through his ears, the smell of cordite filled his nostrils. Like a sharp, searing knife, pain flashed through his left shoulder.

He grabbed Al's gun hand and held on, held on, although blood spurted from the bullet hole. With the other hand he sought for Al's thin, long throat. He squeezed with all his strength, squeezed and pressed grimly, ferociously.

And finally Al went limp under his hands, the gun arm relaxed and slumped to the

floor. Slowly Eddie got to his feet.

But it was a bluff. The gun jerked upward; Al sat up, facing him, gun leveled steadily at his heart.

"You've done it this time, Eddie," Al said. "You're through now. The boys heard that shot; they'll be up from the bar any second."

Behind him, Eddie heard the stairs and the landing creak.

"You were the fall guy this time, Eddie," Al said.

The door opened softly and quietly and a draft of air swung briskly through the room.

"You were a sucker, Eddie," Al said.

"So were you, Al," a voice from the doorway replied.

Eddie whirled around. It wasn't Fatso or any of the boys. It was Joe Murphy. And behind him, were two other cops, in blue uniforms.

"Put it up, Al," Joe Murphy said. "We heard you; we heard every word you said. We spotted Eddie near the diner tonight and tailed him here and picked up the whole conversation."

An hour later, his shoulder bandaged, Eddie hurried along the street once more.

It was over now. The weight was off his back; the threat was gone from his life. Ahead of him somewhere were Lois and the diner. And fifty dollars every Saturday. Grubby, hard, inelastic dollars. Dollars that didn't cover much territory, didn't spread far. Dollars you couldn't fold lengthwise and drop on the dice table.

Good dollars. • • •

THE SECRETS OF DETECTIVE WORK

INGENUITY PLUS

THE amount of care and ingenuity that an investigator must exercise in order to do his job successfully is aptly illustrated by the following two cases.

One concerns an Englishman who had a homicide on his hands. He was stumped in regard to the time of death. It couldn't be calculated from the deterioration of the body, due to the fact that it had been exposed to extremely cold weather, and found in deep snow. Yet he determined the hourage with an excellent degree of accuracy by doing some simple but extremely close calculating.

This included measuring the normal temperature of the victim at expiration, as against that at which the corpse was discovered. Then he figured the amount of time it would take for the body to reach this low degree, after accounting for the coolness of the air and the warmth of the clothing. His figures were so accurate that he was off (as proven later) by less than an hour.

An even more resourceful and vigilant bit of investigation was executed by a Berlin operator in the 1930's. He was on the prowl for a descriptionless man. He knew nothing whatever about his mysterious quarry other than the post office where he was committing his unlawful practice—which consisted of sending illegal literature through the mails.

Yet he captured his anonymous fellow after discovering that he bought stamps there also.

The set-up was simple: First, all stamps at this post office were marked with a secret code. This revealed the day and the hour of their purchase. Then a hidden camera, which the stamp seller operated, was placed so that a picture could be taken secretly of each quantity buyer. The time was determined by a calendar and a clock which were innocently planted in the background. After this, the rest was pie—for the next batch of confiscated literature that bore coded stamps obviously had to have been purchased by the man who was photographed in the act, at the time and day shown both in the picture and on the stamps!

—Carter Critz.

DETECTIVE MOVIE NEWS

Come Fill the Cup

Scandal Sheet

Hong Kong

My Favorite Spy

THIS season you can have your mystery any way but straight. There's not a plain and simple detective story in Hollywood's current crop, but there's plenty of excitement, acres of picturesque settings, a morgue full of baffling murders and a generous spicing of laughter.

Two of the thrillers are about the newspaper business, though right there the resemblance ends between *Come Fill the Cup* and *Scandal Sheet.* The first is James Cagney's new film, in which he's the old, familiar, tough, breezy character his fans enjoy. This time he's on the right side of the law, though on the wrong side of the bottle—i. e., outside. But when he has alcoholism licked, he faces something even more sinister—gang murder. He is determined to prove that a mobster killed his old friend, and to do it he leads the girl he loves and himself into a trap, from which there is no way out but death—for someone.

During the shooting of *Come Fill the Cup,* Jimmy paused one day to wipe a misty eye and to explain that exactly twenty years ago occurred the historic moment when he clobbered Mae Clark in the puss with a grapefruit, thus bringing glory to himself, to Mae, to Warner Bros., and to grapefruit in general. Fans have long memories for violence that pleases them. Jimmy says that even now he occasionally gets a grapefruit through the mail from an admirer in a nostalgic mood.

Ruthless and Power-Mad

In *Scandal Sheet* Broderick Crawford switches over to the wrong side of the law, after his relatively heroic performance in *The Mob* (which we told you about in the last issue). As Mark Chapman, a ruthless, unethical believer in yellow journalism, Brod plays the same kind of power-mad character he did in *All the King's Men,* and which won him an Oscar.

Mark Chapman will stop at nothing to build circulation for his sheet. A good name ruined, a poor wretch exploited, a precious secret exposed to publicity—these things mean nothing to Chapman but headlines and more circulation. But when his own dirty past is about to be dug up, it's a different story. He murders the wife he deserted years before to save himself from public humiliation. He tries to make the killing look acidental, and his paper carries only brief mention of a woman found dead in a bathtub.

And then his own philosophy of milking every news event for scandal comes back

© *Warner Bros.*

Jimmy Cagney and James Gleason in a scene from "Come Fill the Cup"

© *Columbia Pictures*

Donna Reed watches John Derek haul off on Broderick Crawford in "Scandal Sheet"

to haunt him. He has trained one of his reporters, Steve McCleary (played by John Derek) in his own philosophy of relentless newsgathering. Steve thinks the woman was murdered, and he sets out to prove it, not knowing that each clue he finds will lead him step by step to his own boss, to his hero.

When Columbia first made plans to film *Scandal Sheet,* the studio expected to use actual newsroom settings. The director and cameramen cased several newspaper offices in and around Los Angeles, and found that the real thing was not as practical as the phony. For one thing, most city rooms are cluttered and crowded with desks, leaving almost no room for the camera to maneuver. The newspaper office you'll see in *Scandal Sheet* is equally cluttered and crowded, but the camera can move around because the walls are mobile. It was also impossible to rig up sufficient lighting in the actual newsrooms. And it seems to us that there must have been one more drawback—a real newsroom is trying to put out a real newspaper every day, and a lot of cameras, microphones and actors might have hampered operations considerably.

Phony—but Real

Anyway, Columbia built a composite of several offices, and then called in some reporters for criticism. The effect was so realistic that one of the newsmen took off his coat, sat down at a typewriter and started batting out a story.

The local papers had Brod and John hanging around for a couple of weeks, breathing down the reporters' necks and learning that almost no newspapermen typewrite with the touch system, or wear their hats on the backs of their heads, or go around yelling, "Stop the press!"

Paramount has two candidates for the

enjoyment of mystery fans. They're both exotic in setting, and they're both spine-tinglers.

The first, *Hong Kong,* was produced by William Pine and William Thomas, the team that's so successful that Hollywood calls them "The Dollar Bills." It's the story of Jeff Williams, an adventurer (Ronald Reagan) who turns up in China looking for a few fast bucks and not too fussy where he finds them. The bucks turn out to be plentiful and they turn up in a strange place—concealed in the ragged clothing of a Chinese orphan.

A Treasure

What Jeff actually finds on the youngster is a bejeweled idol, and the money, $100,000 of it, is not forthcoming until he can steal the treasure from the child and sell it to an unscrupulous native fence. The little boy is being cared for by Victoria Evans (Rhonda Fleming), a mission school teacher, and when Jeff falls in love with her, he regrets his scheme to swindle the child. By this time, though, too many wily villains know about the existence of the idol, and Jeff has a much more dangerous mission in protecting the treasure than he had in stealing it.

The other Paramount thriller stars Bob Hope. A Hope picture is not ordinarily meat for mystery fans, but we guarantee that when you see *My Favorite Spy,* you'll be alternately on the edge of your seat and leaning back holding your sides. Bob plays a dual role in this one. He's suave, sinister and yet romantic as Augustine, the international spy; and he's tangle-footed, ski-nosed and uproarious as Peanuts White, a burlesque comic.

Peanuts, of course, is mistaken for Augustine and sent on a mission involving microfilm, a million dollars and Hedy Lamarr. The suspense is breathless, and Bob's escapes from several bloody fates are by the merest squeak. But after a breathless squeak, it's a great relief to have a loud guffaw.

—Ann Kennedy

Novelet of a Murderous Honeymoon

The killer who attacked insurance investigator Max Slade on that dismally dark street wore shoes—but no socks

SUICIDE CLIFF

by NORMAN A. DANIELS

CHAPTER I

Homicide Case

SHERIFF LINTON had a brawny arm and a big fist, and when he smacked the top of his desk, everything on it rattled. His fat face was red and getting redder.

"I won't stand for it!" he shouted. "I filed a report on those two deaths and it goes. You greenhorn snoops from insurance companies don't know the first thing about investigations. I tell you my report was authentic, and you've got to accept it."

Max Slade, crack investigator for Security Risks, was used to irate policy holders, fraudulent claims, and hopping mad law officers.

He said, "Relax, Sheriff. All I want to do is prowl a bit. People won't even know I'm in town unless you tell them."

"Yah!" Sheriff Linton exploded. "How are you going to check two violent deaths without asking questions? And when you start that you'll make a couple of mighty nice people unhappy. Anyway, it's as clear as the nose on your face that those two kids fell off that cliff accidentally."

"Trouble with that theory," Slade said, "is that I can't see the nose on my face unless I look in a mirror. And I can't see your theory either. Maybe you don't know all the facts."

"I know a whale of a lot more than you do —or will," Linton insisted.

Slade went on, calmly and without a trace of rancor, "Look. These two kids, Fred and Joan Randall, were married four months ago over and above the protests of the girl's aunt and uncle—"

"So what's that got to do with their falling off the cliff? If you mean to try and prove that the Bixbys tossed them over to get the girl's insurance, you're crazy."

"I'm trying to prove they didn't," Slade tried to explain. "So the policy on the girl's life can be paid."

"What kind of a racket you people running?" Linton demanded. "The girl was insured, wasn't she? So pay off and get it done with."

"It's not that easy," Slade protested. "Only the girl was insured. A big policy—fifty thousand dollars. Now, she and her new husband fall off a cliff after an argument. If she fell accidentally, or was murdered by her husband, we pay off. If she killed her hus-

band, then jumped, that's suicide, and her aunt and uncle don't get a dime. They also won't get paid if they murdered her."

LINTON gave a long groan. "I'm telling you it was an accident."

"Look at it this way," Slade went on. "If we paid off any and every claim, insurance rates would be so high nobody could afford them. Now I happen to know that Joan was the daughter of Ruby Lane, an actress who died two years ago. Ruby had a famous temper and Joan inherited some of it."

Sheriff Linton rubbed the stubble of beard on his chin. "What's that got to do with it?" he demanded.

"A girl with a first-class temper, arguing with her husband near the edge of a cliff, could have heaved him over and then, out of remorse, jumped herself."

Linton laughed uproariously at that one. "You been around, you say? Not with your eyes open, my lad. Joan Randall was five-feet-five and weighed around a hundred pounds. Fred was six-feet-one, two hundred and better. So she tossed him off."

"It's been done," Slade said. "And I'm going to find out if it happened here."

Sheriff Linton wagged his head. "That's police work, and ought to be left for police who know their business. We take care of things like that, and do it well too."

"Like the Palmerville Trust Company stickup?" Slade asked mildly. "That town is in your jurisdiction, and somebody made a sixty-grand withdrawal from the bank six months ago—using a gun for a pass book."

"We'll get the man who did that job," Linton vowed. "Wait and see."

Slade chuckled. "We insured that bank too, Sheriff. However, I'm not rubbing it in. Even the F.B.I. hasn't been able to crack that one. All I'd like from you is cooperation."

The intense crimson in Linton's face was slowly receding to a pink hue. "You're working against facts, Mr. Slade. Nobody saw those two deaths. The edge of the cliff showed signs of a struggle, but that could have happened when one or the other of those two tried to save the one who was falling off, and they both went. I put it down as an accident and that's how it'll stay."

Slade nodded. "Okay, Sheriff. I'll be at the Park Hotel if you want me."

"I won't," Linton predicted.

Slade walked out into the street and turned north. He strolled along the sidewalk, casually studying store windows and pedestrians. He always liked to get a line on what sort of a town he worked in, and this one seemed to be a trifle more sleepy than the average small community.

He had an early dinner in the hotel dining room, then found a place that rented cars and hired a rickety, aged vehicle. He drove to the cliffside overlooking the sea, parked as close to the spot of the accident as he could get, and walked the other half-mile.

There was still enough light in the sky so he could distinguish the footprints. Whatever else Sheriff Linton did, he didn't destroy evidence, and he had apparently kept others from tramping around and messing up the prints of the young couple who had dropped, fallen, stumbled, jumped or been thrown to the high rocks below.

Close to the edge of the cliff there was little grass and no brush. Just cleared, soft earth which retained footprints quite well. Slade studied the jumble of them. There were the big shoe marks the man had made, and the much smaller ones made by Joan Randall's flat-heeled shoes. It was impossible to tell which set had first reached the edge of the cliff and the nearer of the shoes had gone overside. It was obvious that there'd been some sort of a struggle. The indentations were deep in places, indicating resistance, but both sets of prints showed that.

Slade sat down on a smooth rock, lit a cigarette, and began trying to puzzle it out. He was less than thirty, plenty young enough still to be a romanticist, and he wondered how a girl and boy who'd been married less than six months could have become involved in a quarrel serious enough for one to take the life of the other. He hoped Sheriff Linton was right and that it had been an accident, but it was his job to make certain.

HE WRINKLED his nose, held the cigarette away from his face, and wondered what made the smoke smell so badly. It

seemed to have the odor of cheap bacon being fried in plenty of its own grease. The smell went away before he started back to the car, and he thought no more about it.

He drove straight to the honeymoon cottage where the dead couple had lived since their marriage. It was a little one-story place, freshly painted white, and with a well-cared-for yard. The windows were illuminated, which surprised Slade some. He walked up on the porch and rang the bell.

A girl of about twenty-four, red-headed, pert-nosed, and wearing an apron over a housedress, opened the door.

Slade said, "I'm sorry. I didn't think anyone was living here."

"We moved in only yesterday," the girl said.

"Who is it, Beth?" A man's voice came from somewhere inside the house.

"I don't know, Steve," the girl called back. "Some man."

A husky-looking man of about thirty-five walked up to the door. He had a narrow, sensitive face, bright blue eyes, and was about Slade's own build, which was about average.

He said, "I'm Steve Fraser and this is my wife, Beth. Did you want to see us?"

"Well, yes," Slade said. "I'm investigating the deaths of the two people who used to live here. I'm an insurance company's investigator."

"Come on in," Beth Fraser invited. "Those poor kids! It's almost as if they were here now. All their things are still in the house."

"Yes," her husband added as he moved away from the door. "I wish her aunt and uncle would take the stuff out. I don't like living with ghosts."

Slade settled himself into a comfortable chair in the living room. "My name is Slade," he said. "This is a routine checkup. You see, the girl was heavily insured, but the policy was still in the cancellation period and if she killed herself, it won't be paid."

"Killed herself?" Beth Fraser gasped. "You can't mean that?"

"I hope not," Slade said. "Did you know them well?"

Steve Fraser said, "I guess you could say so. We met them right after they were married. Freddie, the husband, had bought this little place on the quiet as a surprise for Joan. It happened Beth and I had wanted to buy the place too, but he wouldn't sell."

"We're renting it for the present," Beth added.

"Maybe you could give me some idea of what they quarreled about," Slade suggested. "It's common news that they had a big argument."

Steve Fraser settled back in his chair. "Mr. Slade, Joan had a lot of money and Freddie didn't. He broke himself flat, put himself in hock for years when he bought this place. She wanted to help him and he was too proud to accept it. They had a lot of fights about that."

"Was that the cause of the argument which made Joan run out of the house that night, rush over to the cliff where Freddie joined her later, and where the argument seems to have been continued?"

"Nobody can answer that," Beth said. "But I think it was an accident."

"The footprints at the edge of the cliff show signs of a struggle," Slade commented.

"I've got that figured out," Steve said. "That cliff is known as Suicide Leap. I think Joan went there to sort of bluff Freddie. Maybe she got too close to the edge and started going over. He grabbed her and there was a struggle, but it wasn't a fight. Just Freddie trying to save her."

"Could be," Slade admitted. "I'll buy it too, for the time being. Did you find anything in the house which might serve as a clue?"

"Sheriff Linton and the medical examiner went over everything in the house," Beth said. "What they didn't check on, Joan's aunt and uncle did. And there are a couple of prize heels for you."

"Cut it out, Beth," Steve said quickly. "We don't want to get mixed up in this."

"Well—they were mighty glad she was killed, weren't they?" Beth went on. "They got all her money, including this insurance policy. When she married Freddie, they were dead against it because if he survived Joan, he'd get everything."

"That's just hearsay," Steve insisted.

"We can't tell you anything else, Mr. Slade. I'm sorry."

CHAPTER II

Beneficiaries of Death

SLADE nodded, picked up his hat, and left the cottage. He drove back to town, almost convinced that he was up against something no detective would ever crack. He parked the car in a lot behind the hotel and headed into an alley leading to the street. It was a dismally dark alley and he had to pick his way along.

When the attack came, it was so sudden and unexpected that he put up no defense at all until too late. There was a rush of steps behind him. Some sort of a club descended, missed his head, but almost fractured his shoulder. The pain from the blow sent him reeling away. He tried to cover up, and block the next onslaught, but his whole side was numb and he couldn't get his arm up fast enough.

The club struck him a glancing blow along the temple, sending his already spinning wits into faster gyrations. He flailed out with both arms, encountered a human form and somehow managed to drape his arms around the man's neck. He knew it was a man. There was a stubble of beard and the man had a ninety-proof breath from cheap liquor that smelled almost like pure alcohol.

Slade knew it was no use. He was too dazed to fight back. His assailant put the hard heel of a hand against his chin, forced him back, then gave him a hard shove. He staggered weakly away. The club lashed out again, this time colliding with the top of his head. His hat had long since fallen off in the fight so the impact of the weapon was direct and hard.

Slade felt himself falling—falling. He clawed at the cobblestones of the alley, dimly made out two feet planted close to him. He managed to reach out. Fingers closed around one ankle and he let the fingernails bite deeply into the flesh. He was laughing crazily at the idea of a man who went around wearing shoes, but no socks. That was the last thing he remembered. . . .

He woke up in the lobby of the hotel. A doctor was working on him and Sheriff Linton was standing by, rubbing that unshaven chin of his again. Slade sat up, with some help from the doctor.

Linton said, "Well, what happened to you?"

"I—I'm not sure," Slade replied. "I parked my car, walked along the alley beside the hotel, and somebody slugged me. Maybe I was getting too close to the truth."

"About the Randall deaths?" Linton scoffed. "What did you find out?"

"Nothing," Slade said. "That's what makes the attack so odd."

"There's nothing odd about it," Linton told him. "You were robbed. Your watch, money—both gone. I don't know what else, but every pocket was turned inside out."

Slade groaned. "So that was it."

"First robbery we've had in years," Linton grunted. "Any idea who did it?"

"No—it was too dark to see the man. But he was taller than I and heavier, I think. He needed a shave, he'd been drinking and—he wasn't wearing any socks."

"Uh-huh," Linton grunted. "So he could shave, sleep off his jag, put on a pair of socks and he'd look like anybody else. You're no help, Mr. Slade."

"I guess I'm not," Slade admitted. "Doc, am I okay to go to my room?"

The doctor nodded. "I'm sure there's no fracture. If you have a bad headache in the morning, drop in and see me. You'll be all right."

Slade thanked him, took time to send a wire to his home office for more funds, then went to his room. He tried to think it out, but he was still too dazed. He locked the door, propped a chair under the knob and went to bed.

He had a headache in the morning, but not severe enough to make a trip to the doctor necessary. He also had a well-established idea that he hadn't been slugged by any mere footpad. That had been an attempt on his life. He had breakfast sent up and ate while he dressed.

There was money waiting for him at the

telegraph office and he felt much better by the time he reached the big house where May and Albert Bixby lived.

THE aunt and uncle of the dead Joan Randall were a matched pair. Tall, gaunt, small-eyed and thin-lipped, they were more like brother and sister than man and wife. Neither was happy to see Slade and took no pains to hide the fact.

"Sheriff Linton phoned us you were snooping," Bixby said. "I don't see why. Joan was insured. Her premiums were paid up and she fell off a cliff. That's all there is to it."

"Unless she jumped," Slade said.

May Bixby pursed her lips in a gesture of disdain. "Jumped! Let's see you prove that, young man. You'll either have that policy paid and quickly or we'll sue. That's all I've got to say."

"We'll pay," Slade said, "as soon as I'm convinced it was an accidental death. You can help me prove it."

"How?" Albert Bixby demanded.

"By telling me what those two kids were like. And why you were against Joan marrying Freddie."

"Freddie wasn't right for her," May Bixby said promptly. "Joan had money. She came from a famed theatrical family. What did Freddie have to offer her? Nothing!"

"All right," Slade said. "One other thing. Why did Joan make you two the beneficiaries of this insurance policy when she knew she was going to marry Freddie?"

"She wanted to provide for us," Albert Bixby said. "Her father died long ago. When her mother died a year ago, we took her in. She was grateful, and just because she was getting married didn't mean she was walking out of our lives."

Slade crossed his legs and fiddled with his hat. "Don't think I'm prying. This is just a job I'm doing and I want to finish it as fast as I can. If you people are entitled to that insurance you'll get it within three days after I make my report. But I've got to be sure."

"We understand that," May Bixby told him.

"Okay. Then tell me this. If Joan was left all that money by her mother, who gets the estate now that both she and her husband are dead?"

"We don't know," Mrs. Bixby said. "Not yet. There was no will. It's up to the courts to decide who died first. Joan or Freddie. If she was the first to go, I suppose he became her heir and his people will get her money. We'll fight that, and you can't blame us."

"But we'll compromise, too," Albert added quickly.

Slade nodded. "One more question. I understand they had a rather serious argument that started a day or two before their deaths. What was it about?"

May Bixby gave her husband an inquiring glance, and he bobbled his head up and down in silent agreement that the question should be answered.

She said, "We're not sure. Joan came home to us. She'd been crying. She said it was money that caused the trouble. Then Freddie came, they made up and went back to their cottage. That's all we know."

"Freddie had no money?" Slade asked.

May Bixby frowned for a moment. "He had a job that paid fifty dollars a week. He swore he wouldn't use a cent of her money. But he did. That big pride of his soon crumpled, just as we know it would. He bought a new car. Cost three thousand."

"A car?" Slade asked. "First I heard about it."

"Freddie bought it out of town. Paid cash, too. Joan drove here in the car. She said it was her birthday present from Freddie, and she said she was going to leave it here."

"She did too," Albert added. "It's still in our garage. Joan wouldn't drive it away and Freddie said it didn't matter."

"I'd like to see that car," Slade said.

"Come on." Albert got up. "We'll go out the kitchen door."

IN A few moments Slade stood looking at a brand new light-blue convertible. Exactly the kind of car a young man would dream of giving his bride for a present. Flashy, expensive and attractive. Slade opened the glove compartments. In one of them he found a birthday card which Fred-

die had apparently tied to the wheel. In the other compartment was a receipted bill of sale from an auto agency in a city more than eighty miles away.

Slade said," This car cost more than three thousand, as you told me. So Freddie must have used Joan's money to buy it—if he paid cash."

"The receipt from the auto company shows he paid for it," Albert Bixby observed drily.

"Sometimes," Slade explained, "a receipted bill of sale is given the customer even after the car is financed. I'll find out about this."

"I think May and I should have kept our mouths shut," Bixby commented. "Just complicates matters and gives you an edge so you don't have to pay up."

Slade soothed him with a few words, then walked around the house to the street where he got into his rented car and headed back to town. He didn't stop off, but proceeded in the direction of the city where Freddie Randall had purchased a three-thousand-dollar convertible at a time when he wasn't supposed to have any money of his own and when he'd vowed never to use his wife's fortune. A car which he'd presented to Joan as a birthday present, and which she had refused to drive.

There was a tie-up between all this and the death of these two, but Slade couldn't put a finger on it yet. First of all, he wanted to be certain that Freddie had paid cash for the car.

Eight or nine miles beyond town Slade spotted a black sedan about a quarter of a mile behind him. It stuck there, never increasing or lessening the distance between the two cars. Slade stepped on the gas, spurted forward, and the black sedan did the same thing. With vivid and fresh memories of that encounter in the alley the night before, Slade began to grow worried.

Just about the time he decided he must shake off this pursuer, the black sedan put on a burst of speed and sailed on by him. He couldn't see who was at the wheel because the driver had his hat tilted to one side. There was someone else in the front seat also. A man who was slumped so low that only the top of his hat showed.

CHAPTER III

Corpse in the Cave

AFTER the car vanished in the distance, Slade relaxed. He wondered if he was getting a case of jitters, thinking every car behind him was a tail. He slowed up some, forgot the black sedan, and covered another five miles. He drove around a bend, and that was when he saw the man.

The fellow was getting up from the middle of the road. His clothing was disheveled, his hat lay in the middle of the highway. He reeled dizzily and seemed headed straight into the path of Slade's car. Obviously the man had been hit and left lying in the road, and was just coming out of the jolt he'd received.

Slade hit the brakes hard, squealed to a stop well beyond the man and backed up. The victim was a dirty-looking individual, but that might have been caused by being dragged over the road.

He clawed weakly at the door of Slade's car. "Get—get cops," he mumbled. "Black car—hit me and went on. I'm hurt—hurt bad."

As if in full proof of it, he started sliding to the road again. Slade jumped out, picked the man up and managed to get him into the back seat where he made him as comfortable as possible. The man seemed to be unconscious. Slade slid behind the wheel and started up. In a moment he was doing fifty. According to his map there was a town ten miles further on where there'd be a doctor or a hospital.

The wind, pouring through the open window, was chilly and he knew that unconscious people can easily catch cold. Slade rolled the window up. After a mile or two he became aware of the fact that the interior of the car was slowly filling with the odor of cheap booze. It smelled like pure alchohol and he recalled that odor. The man who'd attacked him the night before had had a breath which matched that aroma.

Slade turned his head. The man still lay on the back seat. He needed a shave badly.

Slade's eyes shifted to the floor of the car where the unconscious man's feet were sprawled out. The trouser legs were pulled up enough so that he could see the man wasn't wearing socks. And just above each shoe were scratches and bruises where Slade himself had grabbed this man.

Slade's foot moved toward the brake, moved away again. Here was the man who'd attacked him in the alley, and all this must be a plant to set up a new attempt. But if he accused the man, there would only be a denial, and he had no absolute evidence. However, if the man tried again to kill him, and he was ready for it, he'd have a good chance of survival and also have positive proof.

Slade raised his eyes to the rear-view mirror. By tilting it a trifle he could keep the man in view. He reached for the mirror and as it moved, he saw the man rising up, a fist clubbed and raised. Slade couldn't do much about it except roll with the punch aimed at the back of his neck. Even so, the force of the blow stunned him somewhat, so that when he slumped over the wheel, his limpness wasn't all an act.

The killer quickly grabbed him, yanked him back and, leaning over the seat, grasped the wheel. He had selected a special part of the highway. They were rolling down a steep hill now. Near the bottom it went into a curve and any car which didn't make that turn would hurtle over an embankment.

The man held the wheel just long enough to keep the car from going off the road too soon. Then he opened the door and jumped. He landed clumsily, but seemed to be unhurt because he quickly scrambled to his feet and high-tailed for the brush.

Slade knew he couldn't stop the car. It was already hitting the soft shoulders and headed for the embankment. He got the door open. The car crashed through brush. Another dozen feet and it would start flying for a short distance before it rolled over and over.

Slade threw himself clear of the car. He landed in the brush which ripped his clothing and his skin, but padded the fall and kept him from rolling. He heard the crash as the car hit. He finally extricated himself, got to his feet and walked forward until he saw the wreckage of the car. If he'd been in it, he would be dead right now.

Slade had always been slow to anger, but there was a rage burning in him now. That man without socks, the man who drank raw alcohol and looked like a bum, was an important factor in this affair. Slade meant to find him as quickly as possible, and it would be a pleasure to make him talk.

HALF an hour later, the insurance investigator finally trudged up to a farmhouse. He phoned to town for another car, then telephoned the auto agency from which Freddie Randall had purchased that convertible. Without much difficulty he learned that Randall had appeared at the agency, bought the car in five minutes, and paid for it in twenties, fifties and hundred-dollar bills.

Slade mulled that over while he waited for his new car to arrive. He thought back on several other things, too. Like the smell of cheap bacon frying when he'd been at Suicide Cliff looking over the scene of the deaths.

Someone had seen him there. Someone who lived nearby, probably in the open, and prepared a meal under the stars. The uncouth man who twice had tried to kill him looking for a cave. Just a shack or a camp.

It was mid-afternoon when Slade parked his car half a mile from Suicide Cliff and crossed the forest growths toward the cliff. He moved cautiously, and now and then stopped to listen. It took him almost an hour to find the cave, mostly because he wasn't looking for a cave. Just a shack or a camp site.

The mouth of the cave was well-hidden by brush and he'd have missed it entirely except for the smell of burned coffee. Inside the cave he found out what caused that. A small fire was still smoldering in a makeshift fireplace and a pot of coffee had boiled over.

The man he wanted was there, too. He lay on a pile of ragged blankets and burlap bags. His arms were outstretched and just beyond the fingers of his right hand was a whisky bottle about a quarter full of a colorless liquid.

Slade bent over the man. "Get up," he called softly. "Get up before I start smacking you around."

The man didn't reply. Slade slapped him lightly and nothing happened. He hit the fellow's face harder. The head turned sideward and stayed there. He saw now that the eyes were only half-lidded and a closer look told the whole gruesome story. The man was dead!

Slade straightened up with a jerk of surprise and sudden horror. Finally he picked up the bottle, being careful not to handle it except with a pocket handkerchief. He sniffed of the contents and grimaced. Maybe this cave-dwelling killer was accustomed to drinking a cheap alcoholic concoction sometimes known as smoke—but this wasn't smoke. It was certain death. The man had been drinking denatured alcohol, and enough to kill him quickly.

The body was still warm and Slade estimated the man had been dead about an hour. The investigator's first impulse was to get Sheriff Linton as fast as possible, but he hesitated, and began a search of the cave. He found nothing that interested him. He didn't like the idea of searching a dead man, but he did it and this time he drew one important and rather startling result.

The dead man had a dirty, dog-eared notebook in his pocket. It contained a single entry. A telephone number written on a comparatively clean page, showing it had been entered recently. Slade appropriated the book.

He also found better than two hundred dollars in tens and twenties on the man. This he carefully put back. Then he hurried to town and brought Sheriff Linton back to the cave with him.

Linton surveyed the corpse. "Well," he said, "I can't say I'm surprised. This is Ziggy Kummer, our town bum. Been locked up twenty or more times for being drunk. He'd drink anything with alcohol in it and I always figured some day he'd get hold of the wrong kind of stuff and go just like this."

"Ziggy Kummer," Slade said slowly, "is the man who attacked me in the alley last night."

"How do you know that?" Linton asked. "I thought it was too dark for you to see the man."

"It was—but he was the guy, and he tried again today to kill me, posing as a man who'd been struck by a car. When I picked him up, he tried to knock me out and he sent my car over a bank. I jumped in time to save my neck. Then I came looking for him—and this is the way I found him."

"But Ziggy is no footpad," Linton argued. "He's strictly a moocher. Maybe he'd roll a drunk, but he'd certainly never tackle a man like you."

"Maybe he would if there was enough of an inducement," Slade said. "Another thing—just step outside the entrance to this cave."

LINTON followed Slade outside. Standing erect, a man of Ziggy Kummer's height could just barely look above the tops of bushes and have a clear view of Suicide Cliff.

"Ziggy saw something," Slade said. "Whatever it was, he kept it to himself until he decided to touch up someone. Whoever he approached, knuckled under because Ziggy knew too much, but this person also persuaded Ziggy to get rid of me."

Linton's eyes narrowed. "Why? Do you know anything you haven't told me?"

"If I do, Sheriff, I'm not aware of it. Maybe somebody's just afraid of me."

Linton bent over the man to search him. "Bosh," he said. "You're still harping on the accidental deaths of Joan and Freddie Randall. Maybe Ziggy here did tap you on the head last night and he figured you did see him. So he tried to get rid of you today. Fill a man with the kind of stuff Ziggy drank and you can expect almost anything from him.—Say, look at this. Must be the roll he took off you last night."

Slade examined the roll of bills as if he'd seen it for the first time. "No," he said. "I didn't have that much and what I had was in different denominations."

"Are you sure?" Linton asked. "Ziggy never had any money. If this isn't yours, where'd he get it?"

"I told you, Sheriff, he might have been paid off."

"Back on that again, are you?" Linton grunted. "I'm not even remotely interested."

"Well, I am," Slade said tartly. "I'll drop into your office later. You'll probably want a statement from me about this."

CHAPTER IV

Story of Murder

RETURNING to town, Slade parked in the center and entered a drug store. In a telephone booth he dialed the number he had found written in Ziggy's notebook. There was an immediate answer and he recognized the voice instantly.

"Mrs. Bixby," he said, "this is Slade. May I come over to see you and your husband? Right now?"

"Of course, Mr. Slade," May Bixby replied. "You know we want to do all we can to help."

Slade first stopped at Sheriff Linton's office. Linton was beginning to look worried.

"I've been checking on that poison alcohol which Ziggy got hold of, but I can't find anybody who'll admit they sold it to him. In fact, they all say that even if Ziggy tried to buy it for another purpose than drinking, they wouldn't have sold it to him."

"Do you think anybody that did would admit it after Ziggy was found dead?" Slade asked.

"Maybe not, Mr. Slade. But this is a small town. Everybody knew Ziggy and I believe them when they swear they'd have refused to sell him that stuff. Also, I can't find that Ziggy left town to buy it anywhere else,"

"Ah"—Slade smiled—"now we start thinking alike. It's occurred to you that somebody else might have bought the stuff and given it to Ziggy. You'll recall that the bottle wasn't labeled poison, which it should have been."

"All right." Linton nodded. "I agree with you. But I still can't see what this is all about, and I can't for the life of me figure out why those attempts on your life were made."

"I'm beginning to get an idea," Slade told him. "Though it's too vague to talk about. Sheriff, what happened to the clothing worn by those two kids when they went over the edge of the cliff?"

"Everything was turned over to Joan's aunt and uncle. But you wouldn't find any clues there."

"I wonder," Slade said musingly. "Tell me—when Joan was found, were her shoes still on her feet?"

"Yes. I remember because when we picked her up, one shoe fell off."

"What kind of shoes were they, Sheriff? Did they have straps or laces?"

"Neither. Just the kind you slid into. Pumps, I guess the women call them."

Slade said, "Thanks, Sheriff. Will you be around here a while?"

"If you want me to," Linton said. "I feel I owe you something for the brush-off I tried to give you. I could have been wrong about Joan and Freddie being accidentally killed."

"In a short time I may have proof of it, one way or another," Slade said. "I'll either come in or call you. We may have to work fast, so I'll appreciate your standing by."

Slade drove to the home of May and Albert Bixby. As he pulled up, both came out on the porch to greet him. In the living room Slade sat down and without preamble went into his reasons for coming.

"Sheriff Linton tells me that the clothing of Joan and Freddie were turned over to you. I'd like to see the stuff."

May Bixby flushed slightly. "Oh, but that's impossible. We—we burned it all."

"That's right," Albert chimed in. "It reminded us too much of Joan—when she was alive."

"Uh-huh," Slade grunted. "Did you know we just found Ziggy Kummer dead?"

"Why, what's that got to do with us?" Albert demanded.

"Did you know him well?" Slade asked.

"Good heavens, no," May answered quickly. "He was the town drunk."

Slade tok the notebook out of his pocket. "Then why do you suppose Ziggy had your phone number written down in this book—along with a few other little items?"

"I really couldn't say." May Bixby clasped her hands so tightly they looked bloodless.

"He came here to see you, didn't he?" Slade asked. "You might as well tell the truth. We know a lot more than you may think."

ALBERT BIXBY tried to bluster it out. "I don't like your attitude, young man. If there is any evidence that we were mixed up with Ziggy Kummer, tell us what it is and we'll disprove it."

"Knowing Ziggy is only one phase of it," Slade said softly. "However, Ziggy was murdered and people who commit murder usually have a strong reason. Like covering up other murders."

"What are you driving at?" Albert Bixby demanded heatedly.

"If we prove that Ziggy came to see you to get money—and you paid him—it's an indication you may have killed him. And it could also indicate that you killed Joan and Freddie."

May Bixby broke first. She covered her face with her hands and sobbed. Her husband tried his best to comfort her, in between glaring at Slade. Finally she raised her head.

"Tell him the truth, Albert," she said. "I knew all along we'd never get away with it. Tell him—everything."

"Believe me," Slade said quietly, "it would be best."

Albert sat down. "We did not kill Ziggy, though I'll admit I thought about it. Neither did we kill Joan and Freddie. They—committed suicide."

May Bixby broke in. "We tried to keep the truth hidden because we were afraid that Joan's estate might go to Freddie's people and all that was left for us was this insurance money which wouldn't be paid if Joan took her own life."

"Go on," Slade urged. "Just what did happen?"

"The—the night they died," Albert said, "Freddie came here in a big rush. He wanted to know if Joan had been here, but we hadn't seen her. He had a note which Joan had left in the house saying she was going to Suicide Cliff and he could find her there. It was a despondent note."

"I have it right here." May got up and opened a table drawer. Slade studied the brief note which she handed him.

Albert went on. "Freddie tore out of here. He was afraid she was going to take her own life. We waited, but when we didn't hear from them—well, we went to Suicide Cliff too."

"And you found them both dead," Slade guessed.

"Yes—at the bottom of the cliff. They were both badly crushed. We had already noticed that at the top of the cliff there were only two sets of footprints, both of them leading straight to the edge in a steady, unbroken line. As if they'd walked off the edge hand in hand."

"It was that insurance policy that made us do it," May took up the story to say. "We returned to the rocks below, took off Freddie's shoes and hunted for Joan's which had fallen off her feet. Then we went back to the edge. We—we put on the shoes and—and made marks as if it had been an accident. That's what we tried to show."

Slade nodded. "Yes, I know. But Joan was small and you had to stretch the shoes badly to get them on, Mrs. Bixby. That's why you got possession of them and destroyed them."

"Yes," she admitted miserably.

"But Ziggy, from his cave, saw what you did. He came here to blackmail you."

"We didn't have much money," Albert said. "Only fifty dollars, but we promised him more when we got the insurance or the estate. You see, we've lived on Joan's generosity for years and we tried to maintain a certain standard which took all she gave us. After she was dead, we couldn't get any more money."

Slade studied the pair intently. He had never seen two more worried people. He said, "Ziggy tried twice to kill me. Someone paid him to do that. The second time, Ziggy must have thought he had succeeded, and reported this to whoever hired him. So Ziggy then had to die, and he did."

"But we don't know anything about that!" May exclaimed in horror. "We couldn't kill

anyone, not even for all that money."

"All we did," Albert insisted, "was try and make those two suicides look like accidental deaths, nothing more."

Slade arose. "Joan had a considerable fortune and somebody must have handled it for her. Who would be able to tell me how much money she spent in the last few days before her death?"

John Rhodes," Albert said promptly. "He's our local banker and he was also executor of the estate which Joan's mother left."

"Good," Slade said. "I'm going to see him. Both of you stay right here. It wouldn't do you the slightest good to try and run away. In fact, it might do you a great deal of harm."

SLADE drove to town and looked up John Rhodes, who turned out to be a handsome white-haired banker, glad to cooperate with him.

Rhode said, "I don't pretend to know what happened to those two nice kids, but I knew both of them since they were born. I've never considered their deaths anything but accidental."

"Everyone wanted to believe that so much," Slade explained, "that they refused to consider anything else. Just as you are doing now."

"You mean, they did kill themselves?" Rhodes asked.

"There is still another way," Slade said.

"Good heavens!" Rhodes gasped. "You don't mean—"

"I mean they were murdered," Slade said flatly. "I've still got to prove this, but maybe I will. First I need information. Freddie bought Joan a three-thousand-dollar car on her birthday. Joan's people think Freddie used her money to buy that gift. I've got to be sure he did."

"Then I can supply the answer, Mr. Slade. He did not. There was no such withdrawal, and Joan did not have that kind of money around loose."

"Thank you, Mr. Rhodes. One more thing. That cottage Freddie bought—had it been unoccupied long?"

"About a year." Rhodes smiled. "I sold it to him, and for just the small mortgage on it. He made me promise not to tell anyone because he meant to surprise Joan with it when they came back from their honeymoon."

Slade offered his hand. "You've helped me a great deal, sir. Now I'd like to call Sheriff Linton on your phone, if I may. Listen in, please, and you'll get a good line on what I'm driving at."

CHAPTER V

Murder Has a Motive

LINTON was waiting for the call. Slade had a long talk with him, outlined exactly what had happened so far and provided Linton with a detailed schedule of what he intended to do next.

Half an hour later he walked up on the porch of the cottage which Freddie had bought as a surprise for his bride. Beth Fraser opened the door. She looked deathly pale, but was otherwise in complete control of her wits.

"I'm sorry," Slade said, "but I've got to look around a bit."

"Steve—my husband—he's not home," Beth protested.

"I'm still sorry," Slade said. "This won't wait. But it won't take long. Just show me where you've piled up the stuff which belonged to Joan and Freddie."

She moved away from the door. "I suppose it's all right."

"Of course it is," Slade grunted. "What's the matter with you? Afraid of something? Or didn't you expect me?"

"It—it's this house." Beth shuddered. "I can't get over the feeling that I'm living here with a couple of ghosts."

"Then that explains it," Slade said with a grin. "Because you look as though you'd just seen a ghost."

She led him to a back room where three trunks were lined up on the floor. Slade opened the first one, dug into it, and discovered what he wanted. He withdrew a number of letters written by Joan to Freddie.

These he carried back into the living room where he sat down.

While Beth Fraser watched him nervously, he spread one of Joan's letters on a table, took from his pocket the note she had written to Freddie telling him she would be at Suicide Cliff. He began methodically comparing the handwriting.

Beth couldn't contain herself any longer. "What's the idea of that?" she asked.

Slade held up Joan's last note. "Freddie found this just before he and his wife went over the cliff. He left it with Joan's aunt and uncle and they turned it over to me. I wanted to compare the writing with some letters I'm sure were written by Joan."

"But why compare them? You just said Joan had written this note you showed me."

"She didn't," Slade said softly. "You did!"

Beth's eyes narrowed. "What are you trying to do? Tie me into this?"

"You can easily prove it one way or another," Slade grunted. "Sit down and copy this note in your own writing. I admit it looks like Joan had written it, but I know enough about this sort of thing to be sure she didn't. And I'll know whether or not you did."

Beth said, "Okay, Slade. Just sit right where you are. Steve's five feet behind you with a gun in his fist. You can turn around and see for yourself if you like."

Slade slowly put the note down, twisted in the chair, and gave Steve Fraser an affable nod. "I expected you, Steve. You don't need the gun. I'm no cop and I don't travel heeled."

"Stand up," Steve ordered. "Beth, frisk him, but stand behind the guy. He's no dope and I'd hate to have to shoot you to get him."

"It would be a pity," Slade said. "She'd never get to enjoy all that money stolen from the Palmerville Trust Company six months ago."

Beth said, "I told you that was what he was after. All this business about checking the deaths of those two kids was a coverup." Steve kept the gun pointed at Slade's chest while Beth searched him. Then Slade sat down. Steve moved a little closer, wary for tricks.

Steve said, "We found that dough and we're keeping it, Slade. We'll never see that much money again, and we're not giving it up."

"The stuff was in the house when you moved in, wasn't it?" Slade asked.

"Sure it was. That Freddie, he had too much pride. He wanted his own dough to finance his wedding, so he stuck up the bank to get it. What else?"

Slade nodded. "Which explains where Freddie got three grand to buy a car and pay cash for it. Okay—what's the deal now?"

"We're taking you and the dough," Steve told him. "We'll dump you some place and you won't get hurt unless you ask for it. But I'm warning you we'll kill to keep that dough."

"It's a mistake," Slade warned. "If I disappear, somebody else will go over the same ground and learn the same things I did. The world's too small for you two to get lost in."

STEVE shrugged.

"We'll take our chances," he said. "We can't let that money go. All our lives we've struggled and scrimped. We never had enough. You work for an insurance company. Okay—they got enough to pay the bank back. It's a case of finders-keepers. Freddie cached the dough in this cottage and we found it when we moved in after he was dead."

Beth added, "I don't think you could even prove it came from that bank stickup."

Slade nodded. "None of the money could be traced, but of course this must be it. Well, you hold all the aces in the deck. I'm not trying to get myself killed, so let's finish it up."

Steve Fraser said, "Beth, get the suitcase with the dough. We'll use Slade's car. By morning we'll be three hundred miles away. No alarm will go out until long after Slade is missed."

Beth hurried away. Slade sat relaxed and comfortable. He said, "Steve, if you're caught carrying the gun, it'll be a case of kidnaping."

"So what?" Steve growled. "Anyway, we're not getting caught. And keep your

trap shut, Slade. You can't talk me into anything, and if you jabber too much I might put a slug through you."

Slade subsided into glum silence. In a few moments Beth dropped a suitcase in the hallway and was swinging into her coat as she entered the room.

"I'll go first and make sure everything is okay," she said. "When I turn on the car lights, bring out this snoop and we'll be on our way."

Steve nodded and Beth walked briskly out of the room. Slade looked up at Steve. "There's nearly a hundred grand in that suitcase, Steve. You must trust Beth an awful lot."

"That won't work, either," Steve snarled. "I'm getting sick of your talk—talk."

Outside the house a car starter whined, gears meshed, and the car pulled away. Steve gave a yell of dismay, raced for the door and ran out on the porch. He was leveling his gun at the tail-lights of the car when Slade hit him in a low tackle.

Steve was slammed hard on the porch. The gun flew out of his hand. Slade punched him twice over the heart. Heavy, weakening blows. Then he rapped a couple of blows to the chin and by the time Sheriff Linton backed up the car and led Beth out, Slade was straddling Steve Fraser and there was no more fight in the man.

Linton put cuffs on Fraser and stuffed him, alongside Beth, into the back seat of Slade's car. Fraser looked glum.

"Okay, so we lost," he said. "You pulled a fast one and we were nuts to think we could put this over on a cop. What'll we get out of this? A year?"

"I'm afraid you'll get the chair," Slade said quietly. "You murdered three people, and you stuck up that bank. Freddie didn't do it. He was on his honeymoon when that happened. You can bet I checked. He was a thousand miles away. You pulled the stick-up and had the dough in this cottage, not knowing that Freddie had bought it. You were dickering for the place and thought it was in the bag.

"Freddie came home, and before you could sneak in and get the money out of the house, he found it. Sure, Freddie needed money. Or thought he did. That was what he and Joan argued about. He wanted to keep it and she said no. They also added up a few things and figured you were the stickup man. Maybe Freddie was going to talk. You couldn't take any chances. You killed Joan, had Beth write that note to Freddie which brought him to Suicide Cliff. You killed him, too, and threw them both over, hoping their deaths would be considered accidental or suicides."

"They gave Ziggy that bottle of poisoned booze, didn't they?" Linton asked.

"Sure they did—after they thought Ziggy had killed me. Ziggy was playing both ends against the middle. He saw this pair murder Joan and Freddie and throw them over the cliff. But he also saw May and Albert Bixby show up and put things in such a mess that nobody could tell what really happened. Ziggy intended to blackmail all of them."

LINTON grunted, and cleared his throat. "The poor sap," he growled. "They talked him into getting rid of you. But, Slade, I still don't see why they figured you as being dangerous."

"That's what tipped me off," Slade said. "I wasn't progressing in my investigation at all. In fact, I was going backwards. Yet there were two attempts on my life, and there had to be a reason. I finally saw it. Fraser thought I was working on the bank stickup. I had been, some weeks ago, and he suspected my investigation of the two cliff-side deaths was only a coverup. That's what made me dangerous."

"Well anyway," Linton said, "it was like I told you in the first place. Those two kids didn't commit suicide or one didn't kill the other. Your company is going to have to pay off on that policy, Slade."

"We'll be more than glad to," Slade said. "It's a just claim, but I don't think the home office will put me down as a complete failure. I got the bank robber and the money he stole. We never expected to see a dime of it."

Linton handed Slade a gun. "Sit in front with me and keep them both covered. We'll head for the lockup, then I've got to pick up May and Albert Bixby. What they did comes under the heading of a crime, too." • • •

THE BRASSIERE MURDER CASE

A True Story

by HAROLD HELFER

Who was the killer that left the bloody calling card?

THE body of the woman had been found in the room of a cheap San Francisco hotel. She was naked and had been savagely knifed to death. But what made it really bizarre was that a brassiere had been found tied around her lolling head.

The hotel clerk remembered well the man who had accompanied the woman to the room. He had blond hair, was rather medium sized and powerfully built and, from the deep suntan and gait, apparently a seaman. They had registered as a "Mr. and Mrs. Myers," but the police took no stock in the authenticity of the name. The fingerprints of the dead woman revealed that she was a Betty Coffman, a minor police character.

Disappearing Clues

It was a lazy spring day in April, 1935, but the almost maniacal savagery with which the woman had been killed spurred the San Francisco officers into around-the-clock action. But they ran into one blind alley after another. The stocky blond seaman they were looking for seemed to have dissolved into the atmosphere.

So, as a matter of routine, the police found themselves down to sending out circulars to different towns and cities, giving a brief summation of the crime and a description of the suspected murderer. As a result of this, the San Francisco detectives got their first real lead.

Small Comfort

But it was far from comforting. The New York police informed them that, while they had no idea where the stocky man being sought might be, they could not help but note that the crime was similar to one that had been committed in a New York hostelery two years before. A Mrs. Florence had been brutally stabbed to death. And a brassiere had been found tied over her head also.

The New York police stated that they had

been looking for her husband, a stockily-built blond man, in connection with the crime, but that he'd disappeared. No trace of him had ever been found.

Now thoroughly alarmed by the information that they might have an individual with "Jack The Ripper" tendencies in their midst, the San Francisco officers combed the city in an all-out effort to bring in the suspect. Men with sex-offense records were hauled in for questioning.

They met with no luck whatsoever.

Five years was to go by before they were able to take up his trail—and then only after he'd left his bloody calling card again. On a rather balmy night in June, 1940, in the room of a fourth-rate hotel in San Francisco, a woman known as Irene McCarthy was found cruelly knifed to death—her brassiere fastened around her head. The clerk remembered that she'd been accompanied by a stocky, well-built blond man.

Now the murder of the kind of women who go to cheap hotels is not altogether uncommon. What gave this case its peculiar stamp was, of course, the business of the brassiere. Police compared the handwriting of the man who had registered for this murder room with that of the hotel room of five years ago which also had produced a slain woman with a brassiere around her head.

The registered names were different, but the handwriting was the same.

Berth for a Killer

Probing around, the detectives ran across two other pieces of information: The stocky man had been heard remarking that he was seeking a "shipping-out berth," indicating he belonged to the seamen's union—and the slain woman had called him by the name of "Harry."

Armed with samples of the suspected murderer's hotel book handwriting, and the knowledge that he was called "Harry," the police now began looking through the union's register of membership.

One signature stood out for them—"Harry Gordon."

There was no address listed for him, but a big union membership meeting was being held that night. A bunch of plainclothesmen made it their business to be on hand for the goings-on.

Undercover

Watching covertly, they soon spotted a stocky blond man known as Harry Gordon.

Taken into custody, he denied any connection with any hotel room murder. Why, the few nights ago they were asking him about, the night the woman was killed, he was with his wife, Lydia, at their Long Beach, California, home.

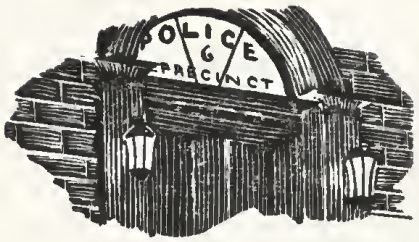
The police then went to Long Beach and checked.

A surprisingly cultured, refined woman, Lydia Gordon said she hadn't seen her husband in a number of months.

Confronted with this contradiction in his statement, the seaman broke down and admitted that he'd not only killed Irene McCarthy, but Betty Coffman and a wife he had in New York, Florence. His real name was Wilhelm Johannsen and he originally had come from Denmark. He'd killed Florence because she nagged him. He didn't know why he'd killed the other two women. Just felt the urge, that was all.

He gave no reason either for his compulsion to "decorate" his victims with a brassiere over their heads, but it was this weird impulse, linking the three crimes together, that proved his undoing and stopped him from possibly committing other heinous crimes of the same nature.

Wilhelm Johannsen was executed in the solemn manner prescribed by California law, but in a very real way it was the strings of the brassieres of his victims that entwined this murderer by the neck and sent him shuffling off this mortal coil.



BUREAU OF MISSING PERSONS

Are there any friends or relatives with whom you have lost contact through the years and whose whereabouts you'd like to determine? Perhaps there's some old war buddy or former schoolmate or sweetheart you'd like to locate. Let's have the facts and we'll publish them. Tell us the name of the person you are seeking, the last known address, and any other facts that will help in making contact. There is no charge of any kind for this service, but please let us know of your success.

I AM ANXIOUS to locate my father, **ANDREW STANDIFER,** whom I haven't seen since I was eleven years of age. He was also known by the name of Curley. He has followed the barber profession. The last time I saw him he was working in a barber shop in Paris, Texas. However, I have reason to believe he has been in the navy in the last war. He is originally from Clayton, New Mexico, and may have relatives there who live in the rural area. I am now married and have three children and would appreciate very much anything you could do to help me.—**Marvin Ray Standifer, 3338 W. 6th St., Ft. Worth, Texas.**

I WANT TO HEAR where my father went after he left Nashville, Tenn., about 1890, or if he died, where he is buried. **JOHN PIERRE PARK** was born in New Orleans in 1838, was a printer, and was last known to be foreman of the Nashville *Banner.* He had lost one eye about that time and went to a hospital, where he met the second wife and soon after left Tennessee. Mother obtained a divorce and remarried many years later. I will pay five dollars to anyone who can give me authentic information in this matter. I live in Crystal Springs and own a home here. I have a number of descendants living in Tennessee.—**George Parke, Crystal Springs, Florida.**

WOULD APPRECIATE any information about **GERDA HAWTHORNE,** or any relatives, possibly with the family name of January. Lived at one time in Cody, Nebraska. My own maiden name is Catherine January Koskela.—**Mrs. Auden Sturtz, 748 E. Armour Road, Oconomowoc, Wisc.**

I HAVE A LOST BROTHER that I haven't been in touch with since I was a child. He is, if living, only three years older than I. I will try to the best of my knowledge to give you all the details: **WAYNE MERVIN (or MELVIN) HARWOOD.** Born in King City, California, Jan. 21, 1903. Father, Lucius Harwood. Mother, Mary Frances (Stevens) Harwood. Only sister, Lorraine Elizabeth, born Jan. 1, 1906. He was last heard of in either Oakland or Berkeley, California, either in 1914 or when he was 14 years old. I'm not sure of that. I believe he was committed to a boys' school in one or the other of those cities. My mother and father separated when I was three years old and mother married a Mr. Kellogg, but I don't believe my brother would know that. If it is at all possible for you to locate this only brother of mine, I don't need to tell you that I'll be eternally grateful.—**Mrs. D. E. Jones, c/o Rose Auto Court, Santa Maria, Calif.**

I WOULD LIKE to contact or hear from anyone who has known or knows the whereabouts of **DOUGLAS DUFF.** He has dark hair. His height is about 5′ 8″ or 5′ 10″. Weight, about 140 lbs. His last known location was North Carolina.—**H. L. Manry, 1225 Palos Street, Athens, Tenn.**

THE COMMISSIONER BREEDS 'EM TOUGH

"The Rock" was his nickname . . . but when enough heat's on, won't steel, or rock—or even a guy's heart—melt?

By R. VAN TAYLOR

BACK when Police Commissioner John Barragan was a rookie on the Wharf Street beat, the word got around that he was the toughest thing since steel. Now, Big Fist Collins, the Wharf Street bully, didn't take this news amicably. No one was tougher than Big Fist, Collins told them down at the Brass Rail. Furthermore, Wharf Street just wasn't big enough for both him and Barragan.

About this time, in walked Barragan; and Big Fist, carried away with his boastful declaration and fortified with approximately a gallon of beer, stepped up to Barragan and hit him a lick that would have killed any lesser man and maybe a mule.

But it just made John Barragan mad.

Later, at St. Luke's Hospital, Big Fist, swathed in bandages and casts, called for a chaplain. The doctors told him that he wasn't going to die. Big Fist made a rapid inventory of his numerous aches and pains and

Marconi cracked. He raised the gun and slashed it into Barragan's face

decided they were lying to him. He wanted a chaplain, dammit!

Little solace was the chaplain able to give him, for Big Fist, moaning and groaning like a man obsessed by the devil, kept staring through his tears at his broken hands and wailing, "Like a rock, he was, Father. Just like a rock!"

No man ever knew John Barragan to be anything but hard and tough, but there was a woman who knew another side of him. She was his wife, Mary. They loved each other deeply. She bore him two sons.

Mary died when the boys were but little shavers. Pat McWhorter, who was later to become Chief of Police under Barragan, attended the funeral. After it was over, Pat told the boys at the precinct:

"He didn't shed a tear. He just stood there at the edge of the grave, holding little Jim in his arms and with little Tom hanging onto his leg.

"Tom—the poor little fellow. He was pathetic. He wanted to bawl. His eyes were filled to the brim. He'd look up at his dad like he wished his dad would cry so he could cry too. But his dad didn't. So little old Tommy would blink 'em back. But he couldn't keep his chin from quivering. . . . Wish John had of cried. A man's got to cry sometime in his life. He just stood there, like a—a rock."

THE ROCK. The nickname was a natural for John Barragan. Six feet four inches of bone and muscle, he was. He demanded the ultimate from himself and his men; he made no compromise.

He wore a black suit, tie and derby in memory of his mother; an elegant handlebar mustache in memory of his father.

The memory of Mary was in his soul.

The Rock raised those two boys of his and, at the same time, climbed up the department ladder without help from friends or politicians. In his fifties he was made commissioner. He was respected by the country's high law-enforcement officials, considered cautiously by its criminals, and was a constant source of amazement to the men under him.

"The Rock's a hard man," was a frequent expression.

"Straighten up, boys. Here comes The Rock."

"It looks like a guy would soften up, both physically and mentally, as he gets older. Why don't The Rock?"

"Listen, Louie, are you going to talk or do you want us to turn you over to The Rock?" And Louie talked. . . .

The force thought Barragan had finally cracked and gone sentimental when he took in a punch-drunk fighter, Percy Hilderbrand, and gave him the high sounding title of "The Commissioner's Personal Assistant." Percy became a devoted man-servant to him.

"We-e-ell, The Rock's finally gone soft and felt sorry for somebody," was the word that got around, causing many grins.

But when Barragan heard of this, he set them straight, and fast.

"I never felt sorry for any man," he said. "The only reason I keep Percy is to keep reminding me of what happens when you're not the best."

That wiped the grins off their faces. This guy wasn't human. Wasn't there anything that would break through that tough hide of his?

Barragan's two boys followed in his footsteps. Tom now had his badge—a rookie cop. Jim was in the police academy and would graduate soon. They got no favors from their father. The department officials, knowing what Barragan would do to them if he ever found out, knew better than to favor them.

Then tragedy struck Barragan.

At nine twelve on that night which would long be remembered, Tom, along with another young rookie, was gunned down in front of a Wharf Street liquor store.

Barragan had had him assigned to that beat, the toughest in town.

It hit the whole force, hard. Surely this would break The Rock.

Patrolmen Wilkins and Peterson of Barragan's small personal force were the first to arrive at the scene of the shooting. When they skidded to a stop in front of the liquor store, the crowd moved back and gave them room. In the distant night other sirens sprang to life.

They found Tom sprawled in the doorway, shot in the back. Larry De Shazo, the other

officer, lay crumpled beneath the bullet-shattered front window of the store. Both had died instantly.

Wilkins and Peterson took down names, statements, addresses; they told some persons to stay, others to move on. They tried to get the store operator—a man named Riccara—calmed down so he could tell them what had happened without getting all mixed up.

"I'll bet my bottom dollar," Wilkins said to Peterson, "that Marconi's got his finger in this."

"You'd probably win," Peterson agreed. "Looks like you're going to win another bet, too."

Their eyes locked. At the beginning of the year Wilkins had bet Peterson that The Rock would crack before the year was out. It was a standard bet among men on the force, and what they meant by "The Rock cracking" was that Barragan would soften, even if it were for only a moment. The men who took such a bet often had to give odds. The men who made such a bet were usually sentimental humanists who believed that everything which was made of flesh and blood would sooner or later begin to act like it, although this didn't seem to be true as far as The Rock was concerned.

But now—

Wilkins took a deep breath. "It's a lousy way to win ten bucks," he said.

CHIEF McWHORTER arrived with a detail of men. An ambulance pulled up. The scene filled with uniforms and department cars.

Then Barragan arrived.

He drove up in his own car—alone. He had turned thumbs down on a chauffeur and limousine. For what that would have cost the taxpayers he could put two more men on the force. The voices died down. The people stood still. The attendants paused as they pulled stretchers from the ambulance.

Barragan got out of his car. Quietly, the people moved back to make room for him.

He went straight to Larry De Shazo and looked down at him. His face was grim, but as he stood there, not a muscle in it changed. Nor, did he look over at Tom.

Pat McWhorter's heart was thumping inside his chest. *You wouldn't go over and look at your own boy first, would you, John? Your guts may be bleeding to do it, but you wouldn't. I would if it were my son. But then, I'm not The Rock. . . . My God, how long are you going to stand there at De Shazo's side? Why don't you go over to Tom? Are you afraid? Have you come up against something at last, that's going to crack you?*

The whole crowd seemed to sag as Barragan turned away from De Shazo and went over to Tom. Not a muscle in his face changed.

But he was numb. The Rock was numb.

He was thinking: *Did I kill him, Mary? I'm the one who had him put on this beat. But you know how your son was. He wouldn't have been satisfied with any other. He was a Barragan. . . . Still, would a good father buy his son a stick of dynamite and give it to him to play with? Did I Mary? . . . Am I going to kill Jim one of these days? . . . How about it, Tom? You tell me. You know, I'll never forget the day we were standing at your mother's grave. I knew you wanted to cry. I'll let you in on a little secret. I wanted to, too. Had you cried, I wouldn't have been able to keep from it. We sort of bolstered each other up, didn't we? . . . Tom, don't cry now—please.*

A flashbulb popped. Barragan turned to face a reporter who had walked up to him.

"Any statement, Commissioner?"

"Officers De Shazo and Barragan died honorably in the line of duty. Their deaths will be avenged."

The scene came alive again as Pat McWhorter came forward, followed by Wilkins and Peterson. The bodies were removed.

"What's the dope?" Barragan asked.

Wilkins flipped open a notebook. "A little after nine—"

"The *exact* time, Wilkins."

Wilkins flushed. "Nine ten is as close as we can pinpoint it, sir."

"Go ahead."

"At nine ten these two young hoods come into the liquor store. One of them grabs Riccara while the other rifles the cash drawer."

"Were they armed?" Barragan broke in.

"No, sir." Wilkins got a nod and continued, "While this is going on, Tom and Larry come up. They must have seen it through the window. They were gunned down from a car parked at the curb. The hoods beat it."

"Witnesses?"

"Three, sir, besides Riccara. They're standing right over there. Riccara is the only one who says he can make positive identification of the men, though."

BARRAGAN turned to Pat. "I want every hoodlum in this town rounded up and brought in," he said. "We're going to find those guys if we have to run everybody in this town through the mill. Have Riccara taken down to headquarters."

"I know what to do," Pat said. Then, as if it were an afterthought, he said, "John, why don't you go on home and get some rest? It's not your job to handle this. I'll get in touch with you as soon as something turns up."

"I'll direct this personally," Barragan told him.

He saw the expressions of sympathy on their faces and knew what they were thinking. He saw Wilkins glance over at the spot where Tom had died.

They were good men—Wilkins and Peterson—tops. And Pat. They didn't come any better than Pat. But he didn't want them feeling sorry for him. You can't feel sorry for someone unless you believe that person has been softened or weakened in some way.

A force is as strong as the top man. Barragan wanted a strong force.

"Every job in this department is my job," Barragan said. "From my office down to sweeping out the cell blocks. When I find a man who can run it better than I can, I'll step aside for him." He gave them a chance to say something. No one did, and he said, "Let's get the ball rolling."

Pat relayed orders. Barragan went back to his car.

Wilkins turned to Peterson and said, "Did you say something about me winning a bet?"

Peterson shrugged. "The Rock's a—"

"Yeah."

They went to their prowl car. As they got in, they saw Pat go over to Barragan's coupe and open the door and get in.

Pat said to Barragan, "I'll ride with you."

Barragan nodded and they pulled away. Wilkins and Peterson followed; the chief's car pulled out behind them.

"You're not heading for headquarters," Pat said. "Where're we going?"

"It'll be a little while before they start to bring in men," Barragan said. "I want to go over and tell De Shazo's mother that I'm freezing his badge."

"Jim will be graduating in two days. It would be nice to give him Tom's."

Barragan gripped the wheel tighter.

We wouldn't even have to put him on a beat, Mary. I could fix it. He could be in an office. He wouldn't get killed there.

"Got any ideas?" Pat asked.

"Those boy's weren't amateurs. They tried to pull the stick-up without guns. No professional would risk the rap on armed robbery."

"The guy in the car had a gun."

"Yeah. That's something else that doesn't add. If they were pros they would have known Larry and Tom would be coming along about that time."

Marconi. The name was throbbing in Barragan's mind.

Pat said, "I wished the hell we knew where Marconi was."

Ten years ago Barragan had hounded Emilio Marconi, the top man in a syndicate of thieves, until he was caught, brought to trial and convicted.

Like most of his kind, Marconi had delusions of grandeur. Barragan was his Nemesis. He hated Barragan, not only because he was a thorn in his side, but because The Rock's reputation dwarfed his own warped sense of importance. Marconi, with his conceited, paranoiac personality, was not a man to pass over this lightly.

His desire to attract attention caused him to commit several irrational acts. He admitted pouring acid over Mary Barragan's grave, so that nothing could grow there, as an act of contempt for The Rock. At his trial he made an obscene gesture toward Barragan, one which can be likened mildly

to a dog and a fireplug.

The Court thought he was trying to fake insanity. Barragan wasn't so sure he was faking.

After Marconi served his time, he was seen heading for the West Coast. He disappeared out there—like a ghost at dawn. Now, it was rumored that he was back, organizing and training young thieves. It might be true. There had been an outbreak of minor robberies. All of them had the pro touch.

IF MARCONI were behind it, it must have been rough on him. He was the type of guy who liked to be in the limelight. But, of course, he wouldn't be stupid enough to let his presence be known. It would gum up the works. But what an internal conflict this would cause in him! His desire to attract attention versus the need to stay underground would really build up steam inside of him. He'd have to blow off sooner or later. How would a guy do that, especially if he hated Barragan as much as Marconi did?

"You're thinking," Barragan said to Pat, "that if Marconi wanted to get back at me, it would satisfy him a lot more to get Tom than it would me."

"Yeah," Pat said quietly, "something like that."

Barragan pulled over to the curb in front of a boarding house. De Shazo's mother owned it. Barragan had never met her and he didn't look forward to meeting her now.

They got out of the car. At the foot of the steps that led up to the door, Barragan stopped, squared his shoulders and took a deep breath.

What can I say to her, Mary? Shall I tell her that I had her boy assigned to a beat and that he was killed on it, but that if she'll give me another son, I'll see that it doesn't happen again? Is that what I should tell her, Mary? Is that what I should tell you?

He and Pat went up the steps.

There were several people inside with Mrs. De Shazo. Evidently the word had already gotten there. The people left quietly after Barragan and Pat entered the room.

When Barragan saw Mrs. De Shazo sitting there in a chair, it jarred him. *She looks just like you would have looked, Mary,* he thought. *Exactly like you— as if she had lost a son.*

Barragan's voice was low. "I've come to tell you about Larry, Mrs. De Shazo."

"I know," she said, rising to her feet. She came across to him and grasped his arms and looked up into his face. "You lost a boy, too, didn't you?"

He nodded.

"You poor man," she said. "You poor, poor, man."

Pat's throat got clogged up. He left the room and went outside to where Wilkins and Peterson were leaning against their car. He blinked his eyes, trying to drive the wet feeling away.

"Well, boys," he said, "I finally saw it. I'll swear to God there were tears in The Rock's eyes."

"No kidding!" Peterson said.

Wilkins looked thoughtful. "So he's finally cracked."

"Yeah, I guess he has," Pat said. "And no wonder."

Peterson pulled out his billfold and handed Wilkins a ten. His fellow officer folded it in his fingers and said, "There will never be another one like The Rock. You know, we've cussed the devil out of him because he was so hard and stuff, but—aw, nuts!—I don't guess we'd want him any other way. I just hope that this doesn't—well, change him."

"When I was in the navy," Peterson said, "we had a captain on our ship that was the meanest louse that ever drew a breath. But, boy, we had a taut ship. Lots of pride and snap. He really made us toe the mark. Then we got a new captain. This guy was too good to us—soft. The ship wasn't worth a damn after that."

Pat sighed. "I hope The Rock doesn't change, either. For the sake of the department, I hope it. But I don't know. I've seen fellows like him before. They're plenty hard until something finally whips them. Then, after that—well, they're different."

The speaker in the patrol car blared. Peterson went to answer it. In a moment he came back, all excited.

"They've started bringing in suspects," he told them.

PAT beat it back into the boarding house. A moment later he was coming out with Barragan.

Wilkins, foolhardy sentimentalist that he was, told Barragan just before he climbed into his car, "Commissioner, we're sure sorry about Tom."

Barragan's face was stern. "It was his own fault," he said. "He should have been on his toes. You don't make but one mistake in this kind of business. Remember that, Wilkins."

Wilkins' face lit up like a neon sign as he went back to Peterson. "Did you hear what that—what he said?"

"The Rock's a hard man," Peterson said.

"Here." Wilkins gave him back the ten spot. "I think the chief was lying to us."

Down at headquarters, a steady stream of men began marching across the line-up before Barragan and Riccara. It was slow, tedious work. They were not having any luck.

"You're sure you'd recognize these men?" Barragan asked.

"Yes," Riccara said. "I'd never forget those faces."

For two hours the stream fed by. Then Riccara jumped to his feet.

"That's the man who held me!" he shouted, pointing at the big fellow under the lights.

"What's his name?" Barragan asked loudly.

From out of the darkness. "Tate. Floyd Tate. He's got a record."

Tate shifted uneasily and squinted as he tried to peer past the lights. "Hey, what is this?" he demanded. "I ain't done nothing."

"Bring him into Interrogation," Barragan ordered.

He got the dope. Tate had been picked up at a third rate firetrap where he lived. He had been packing a bag when they walked in on him.

Pat, Wilkins and Peterson were in Interrogation with Tate when Barragan got there. Barragan asked Tate, "Where's your boss, Marconi?"

Tate scowled. "Hey, what are you guys trying to frame me for?"

He was as big as Barragan was, and Barragan could tell that he was the type of fellow who had his brains in his fists.

"Riccara didn't make any mistake," Barragan told him. "Why were you packing your bag when they picked you up?"

"I want a lawyer."

"Are you going to tell us where Marconi is?"

"Who the hell is this Riccara guy anyway? What is it I'm supposed to have done?"

Barragan's face grew grim as he glanced at a door across the room. Like the room it opened into, it was a specially built door, more or less soundproof.

"Get in there," he ordered Tate.

"I don't want to," Tate said.

Barragan pushed him toward it. Tate stumbled then regained his balance. "Watch out, Grandpa," Tate warned. "You'll strain a gut."

"Think so, sonny?"

Barragan motioned back the other officers as he took Tate into the little room and closed the door.

Doubt filled Pat McWhorter's face. "I wish he had of let us go in there with him," he said. "That Tate boy's pretty tough. He was a promising heavyweight until he was barred."

Peterson rubbed his jaw nervously. He glanced over at Wilkins and asked, "How about a game of checkers?"

The two men sat down at a table where a checkerboard was laid out. The chief smoked a cigarette impatiently, his eyes glued on that door.

MINUTES passed. Occasionally a sound would filter through the door. Was that a bone breaking? Was that a groan?

Peterson jumped four of Wilkins' men in one move.

"Hell!" Wilkins said disgustedly. "I can't keep my mind on the game."

Pat's face was white. He ground his fourth cigarette butt beneath his foot and said. "The Rock can bust me if he wants, but I'm going in there."

He didn't get the chance. The door swung open and a sad looking Tate was pushed into the room. A trickle of red oozed from the corner of Barragan's mouth.

Tate was groggy, his cocky spirit broken. "Don't tell Marconi," he pleaded, breathing heavily. "He'll kill me."

Pat perked up. "Now we've got something solid," he said. "Where does Marconi live?"

Barragan took a handkerchief from the corner of his mouth. "He was too cautious to even let his own men know. Pat, he did the shooting. I want him."

"You'll get him," Pat said.

"What now, Commissioner?" Wilkins asked.

Barragan was tired. He'd never felt this tired in his whole life. But, then, he'd never lost a son before, either.

There was nothing more he could do until they got a lead on Marconi. That is, nothing but think about Tom lying in that doorway. His mind had been playing tricks on him for the last hour or so. Sometimes it wasn't Tom lying there. It was Jim.

He wanted to go home and lie down. He'd never wanted to do anything like that before while a big case was on. Was it a sign that he didn't have what he used to have? It didn't matter. He had to lie down or he'd die.

"I'm going home," Barragan said. "When something breaks, contact me."

Wilkins and Peterson exchanged glances. They followed Barragan out into the hall.

Jim was waiting there.

Barragan looked at his son—a strong, handsome young man. But he didn't look like a man to Barragan. He looked like the little kid he'd held in his arms as he stood at Mary's grave.

"Dad," Jim said, "let me help."

"There's nothing you can do, Jim. Go back to your barracks."

"Promise me one thing, Dad. When I graduate, let me have the Wharf Street beat."

Barragan was silent for a moment. "We'll see," he said finally.

"I'll spend the night with you."

"No, I'll take you back to your barracks, son."

After they left, Wilkins said, "That's it."

"Yep," Peterson agreed. "The Old Rock would have climbed all over him for calling him 'Dad' in front of other officers. 'Commissioner,' he'd of made him say."

"And he'd of chewed his butt for breaking regulations when he left the barracks to come over here."

"Did you see the expression on The Rock's face when Jim asked for the beat?"

"He won't get it. The Rock called him, 'son'."

Peterson pulled out the ten and handed it to Wilkins.

BARRAGAN watched Jim go up the steps of the Police Academy Barracks and then pulled away.

We're not going to lose him, Mary. Jim's going to stay alive.

He hoped, that when he got home, Percy wouldn't want to talk about it. Percy. Barragan had never let anyone know how deeply he felt for the punchy fighter, a guy who had given everything he had. He had given it in the ring and now he was giving it to Barragan. True, he wasn't the best, but that didn't matter. The important thing was that he tried to the best of his ability. In Barragan's language, that made him a man.

Jim wanted the Wharf Street beat, Mary. That's what a man would want. But he's not a man, is he, Mary? He's our son.

When Barragan arrived at his quarters, Percy was not at the door to greet him. It was unusual. It worried Barragan. If Percy had found out about Tom's death, it would be just like him, being slightly unstable, to go barging out to avenge the boy's death. The poor fellow might get hit by a car.

"Percy!" Barragan called, walking down the hall.

No answer.

Barragan tensed. He turned into his den and flipped on the lights. For a moment he stood very still, so still that he could hear his own heart beating.

Then he said, "You killed my boy tonight, Marconi."

Marconi laughed, a low, satisfied chuckle. He rose from the chair, keeping his forty-five automatic trained on Barragan's midsection.

The skin around his black eyes was dark and sunken. He was smaller than Barragan, but what he lacked in stature, he made up in meanness.

"Yeah," Marconi said. He talked in short, nervous spurts. "That was real smart of me, wasn't it? Let me tell something to *The Rock.*" He said it contemptuously, then spat at Barragan. "We're just part even. I killed your boy. You don't like that? Good! But that's not all. I'll be the only man who ever made a fool out of you."

"Where's Percy?" Barragan asked.

"In the hall closet."

"Did you hurt him?"

"Not a bit," Marconi said. "He opened the door and I just tapped him on the head and he died—just like that."

Barragan was breathing a little faster.

"I said to myself," he went on, "'Marconi, the heat's on. Where are you going to hide? Why. The Rock's house. What place could be safer than that?' Smart, eh? You see, I knew you didn't know where I was, but I knew where you were every minute.

"Now I'll tell you the funniest thing of all. You're going to drive me out of town—in your car. You're going to help me escape. Then what a laugh I'll have on The Rock! It'll make you the biggest fool of all time."

Barragan knew he meant it. He didn't think that Marconi would kill him. He'd probably tie him up and leave him to be found. In Marconi's eyes, it would be more embarrassing that way. What Marconi wanted was a lingering revenge.

"I'm going to foul your plans up," Barragan said. "I'm going to make you kill me right here."

He took a step towards him. Marconi turned pale and pointed the gun straight at Barragan's eyes. "Stop," he ordered. He didn't want to kill him; Barragan knew that.

"Go ahead and pull the trigger," Barragan said, moving slowly forward. "Someone will hear the shot. You'll never get out of town. They'll get you."

THEY were only a few feet apart now. Barragan saw Marconi's hand tighten on the grip. There would be no pain.

"So I'll be the one who has the last laugh," Barragan went on. "The Rock will have *made* you kill him. He will have upset all your plans. Think about that, Marconi. I'm still smarter than you are."

Marconi cracked. He raised the gun and slashed it into Barragan's face. Barragan grabbed for it. They struggled. Marconi broke free and ran for the door. Barragan shot him in the leg.

He felt the side of his face, then looked at his hand and saw the blood. He went over to Marconi and looked down at him as he lay there helplessly. Barragan raised the automatic.

Where shall I give it to him? Barragan thought. In the belly? No. The mouth.

The barrel inched up. His finger tightened on the trigger.

Would a man do this? he wondered. Just what would a man do?

Take Marconi—if he had been a man, would he be where he was now? Somewhere along the line weakness had twisted him. There was no room for compromise with weakness in a *real* man's life. . . .

It was the next day. Pat was in Barragan's office, was saying to him, "If I had been you, John, I believe I would have shot him."

There was adhesive tape on Barragan's face. He was working at a stack of papers on his desk, tossing this one into a basket, laying the next aside, signing another.

Pat got to his feet. "Well, I guess it's all cleaned up since we got the third guy, too." He looked at Barragan anxiously for a moment, then frowned and started to leave. Halfway to the door, he paused. "There's just one other thing. We're going to have to assign someone to the Wharf Street beat, and I thought I'd ask you first, because you know how that beat is. This officer is going to have to be a real man. Tough."

The Rock said: "Put Jim on it."

Later in the day, Wilkins gave Peterson back his ten dollars, because, as he explained, he had definitely heard The Rock chew out *Recruit* Barragan for not addressing him as "Commissioner"; *and* for breaking regulations when he left the barracks. Furthermore, he stated, if Peterson had heard otherwise it was because his stupid looking ears were out of kilter.

Garth felt disgust for the girl

Shed No Tears for Me

By FREDERICK C. DAVIS

It began, for Garth, with a knock on the door, and it would end wherever that girl led him—with her lovely, bloodstained hands!

HE KNEW suddenly that the only way out was to kill her.

Driving carefully through the freezing mist, both hands tight on the wheel, he felt her nearness like a fever and knew he must kill her now.

Speaking to him rapidly, full of an eagerness for living, she had drawn herself snugly close to his side with her beautifully delicate fingers clinging to his arms—never dreaming

that he was already measuring the rest of her life in minutes.

"It's what I've always yearned to do—to run away to the end of the world with the man I love. There's nothing to hold us back, darling, really nothing."

Nothing but sudden death.

"It will be paradise!" she said, her bright eyes wide open with eagerness for it. "A beautiful place in the faraway tropics. I hear Guatemala is like that. Let's start for Guatemala right now, darling. Let's just turn right at the next corner and head straight for our own private paradise together."

She was heading straight for an icebox instead, never dreaming it.

"I love you, darling," she murmured, her lips close to his ear, "love you more than life itself—"

He didn't answer, but kept his two hands tight on the wheel, his blood running fast with the fever of her nearness. It would have been nice, very nice, to take that right turn to paradise at the next corner. But there were reasons why that romantic little trip must be canceled. Certain obstacles of an unromantic sort were in the way—such as a brace of homicides. She was taking her first and last trip with him right now, a shorter one than she might expect. Much shorter.

It would end any minute now. Destination Hell.

He drove with her lovely head on his shoulder and his bitter eyes fixed straight ahead, looking for a dead end detour. She seemed so trustful at his side, not realizing her last minute was ticking away.

Then he spotted it—and she didn't even seem to feel the tightening of his body—a signpost pointing a short cut to the morgue. . . .

IT BEGAN with a knock on a door.

Before approaching that door Hal Garth paused at a shadowed spot across the street to watch it. It was the hedge-guarded private entrance to a ground floor apartment in a classy modernistic building—one made to order for dark comings and goings.

Garth could picture that door opening on soft lights and sweet music—a beautiful woman slipping in, then, hours later, stealing away again. It had happened, he knew, many times. They came and went by night, these clandestine women, to this lush apartment belonging to a smooth operator named Rex Lionni.

The picture stirred up in Garth a biting sense of envy. Lionni was a high-riding crook who was slated sooner or later to get nailed by the law and moved to slightly less luxurious quarters in the State can, where lovely ladies never called. But just now he was doing very nicely. Much better than an underpaid, nose-grinding assistant D.A., for example.

Acting on orders from his chief, the elegant Curtis Seton—possibly the bluest-blooded district attorney in all the forty-eight states—Garth crossed the street toward Lionni's apartment with his mouth wryly twisted.

"Lionni is causing too much nasty talk around town, Hal," Seton had said this afternoon, sounding indignant about it in his princely way. "He's spark-plugging half a dozen different rackets, from pinballs to numbers, and running them flagrantly. Since Lionni has protected himself against police interference, we'll have to be the ones to stop him. Attack him through his weaknesses, that's the way to do it."

"Ah," Garth had said acridly. "Lionni has many weaknesses, I hear, and all of them are women."

"Just so. There must be a bitter one among them, Hal—one who's jealous and resentful of the others because she wanted to play for keeps. Let's find her. When we do, she may be delighted to help us break Lionni."

Garth doubted it, but Curtis Seton disliked his underlings to disagree with him out loud. Besides, it did promise to become the pleasantest assignment of Garth's otherwise dull and menial career.

Right now there were soft lights behind the lowered venetian blinds of Lionni's apartment. No doubt Lionni was expecting one of his luscious callers momentarily—if she wasn't already there. Garth's curiosity was drawn by the glowing chinks in those blinds. He drifted toward them—and heard gunshots.

Two shots. The reports came close to-

gether—muffled thuds jarring the drawn blinds slightly—followed by nothing.

Garth froze for half a second, then sidestepped to a spot against the wall. He kept his eyes on Lionni's door, expecting to see it pulled wide open at any second, then a woman come flying out, frantic to escape discovery. But it didn't happen. The door stayed closed.

The apartment behind Garth remained still for minutes before he moved again. Puzzled, he shifted to the door and the knob turned in his hand. He caught sight of Lionni at once when he eased the door open.

Lionni was flat on his back in the center of his living room rug, his patent leather toes aimed at a heaven he would never see, his formerly handsome face spoiled for the funeral by the pointblank impact of both bullets.

Garth went in carefully, his steps silent, his eyes shifting from one corner of the living room to another in search of the woman who had not yet run out. Of course it had to be a woman, and she was still in here, not giving way to dumb panic, but using her pretty head. The gun, he was relieved to see, lay on the floor near Lionni, a far better place for it than in the woman's deadly hand.

Sensing her hidden presence at every slow step, Garth passed the dead Lionni and moved up on the bedroom door. The bedroom, featuring satins and mirrors, looked like a Hollywood satyr's dream, and it was deserted. The bath beyond also—open and empty.

All this left only one possibility—the court behind the apartment. Even as Garth turned back he caught the flash of swift motion behind him.

He whirled just in time to see the flicker of a skirt at the door, to glimpse a spike-heeled shoe vanishing. He sprang after them. When he reached the sidewalk he saw fast movements again, this time disappearing into a car. He raced forty feet along the curb to the convertible sitting in the dark there. Just as the starter began to grind he yanked the door open and ducked in.

THE suddenness of his move struck a gasp of dismay from the girl at the steering wheel. She crowded back against the door, abandoning her attempt to start the motor, her eyes wide and her lips parted with the breathlessness of the cornered. Garth froze with his face near hers, staring in stunned surprise greater than hers.

He had seen her before, so many times that his memories of her became a runaway merry-go-round as he stared at her. He knew so well how she came into a room—her self-possessed manner that of a girl who belonged everywhere, the world being her oyster with a pearl in it. He knew how she pulled gloves on her fine slender hands, how her lips flexed as her smile came and faded. He knew the turn of her thoroughbred ankles, the curve of her hips. To all these things he had given yearning notice many times, although her glance had never once lingered on him. She had never given Garth any more notice than she might have given a taxi driver or a waiter. She was, after all, a reigning princess in one of the city's royal families while Garth was just an unimportant member of her father's legal staff.

Her name was Marda Seton.

This was the woman who had pulled the trigger on Lionni tonight—the one woman among all Lionni's others who was "jealous and resentful of all the others because she wanted to play for keeps." That was the way District Attorney Curtis Seton had described her in theory, never suspecting that his own daughter would fill the bill in such a deadly fashion.

She pressed herself back into the corner of the seat, her eyes wide on Garth's, scarcely daring to breathe. He held himself still, his face only inches from hers, feeling for the first time the fever of her nearness. Never before had he been so close to her as now—now upon his blasting discovery that she was a killer.

Garth's senses were a whirlpool, a whirlpool growing deeper as it spun faster and faster. He felt disgust for the girl—shocked that a girl so apparently fine could fall so hard for a cheap character like Lionni. He felt instantly how ugly and loud this news would be when spread across the newspapers' front pages. He wanted no part in it, yet he realized he was already hopelessly entangled in it. But more than these, one other reac-

tion overswept him—the greedy jubilation of an underdog who had suddenly discovered power and riches in his hands.

"Please," the girl said breathlessly. "Don't tell anyone. Please—I'll do anything—"

Full of fever, Garth found himself backing out of the car and striding swiftly back to Lionni's door. He went in with scarcely a glance for the ex-guttersnipe who had been canceled out by a more aristocratic hand than he deserved. He took up Lionni's much-used phone, dialed a number from memory and heard himself speaking in a voice tight with a secret, sour exultation.

"Mr. Seton? Hal Garth reporting, sir. I'm afraid the Lionni case is canceled out—by a couple of bullets. That's right—killed by one of his women, probably. I found the door open when I arrived. The woman had already dodged out. There may be some trace of her left here, but I can't say offhand. Yes, I know that part's for the police. Yes, I'll wait here for them."

He gazed over his shoulder. The white face at the door was Marda Seton's. She had dared to follow him back that far. Her smoky black eyes were on him, shining with a new, quietly fierce light.

"Sorry I can't take you home just now, darling," Garth said quietly. "But I'll see you later. Just a little later, I hope. Wait for me. I'll be along."

Her pale face disappeared in the darkness outside. He heard her high heels tick rapidly along the sidewalk to her car. A slow smile crept over his lips. Too bad his duty forced him to wait here for the police. Too bad he must forego the rare pleasure of escorting Marda Seton home—especially when he had so little to report.

GARTH shifted about in the background of the murder room, his mouth quirked with wry amusement, restlessly looking for an opening to bid these fumbling dicks a none-too-fond good night.

While watching the Homicide Squad working over the late Rex Lionni, Garth gave special notice to Sergeant Johnny Brand. Johnny was taking a keen pleasure in this homicide. He had a boyish flush of excitement on his cheeks and the intent glint of a hunter in his eyes as he searched about for significant details. The youngest man on the squad, just recently promoted, he was taking it as a game.

As the dicks pulled at Lionni's limp body, preparatory to lugging it out to the "meat wagon," Garth heard an elated sound of discovery break from Johnny Brand. Stooping suddenly, Johnny plucked something off the floor. He hunched his shoulders to examine it in a way that put a chill in Garth's blood.

What had Johnny discovered—a trace of the murderess?

Garth took a quick step toward him and at the same time Johnny, his awareness cat-quick, closed his hand over the thing he had found and eased it into his coat pocket. The other members of the Homicide Squad frowned at Garth, but Johnny simply smiled his excited, kiddish smile.

"Find something hot?" Garth asked.

It was an odd thing about Johnny Brand, the way he shared the Homicide Squad's hostility toward the district attorney's staff while at the same time feeling a youngish kind of veneration for Garth. The other dicks' frowns were resentful—they felt Garth was trying to horn in—but to Johnny, who was even more eager than they were to score a bull's-eye, the rivalry was good-natured. Being an old school pal who had always looked up to Garth, there was no jealousy or rancor in him, but just a genial earnestness to play the good game and win.

Garth insisted. "That thing you just found under Lionni's body—is it giving you a few leading ideas, maybe?"

Johnny's broad smile turned boyishly mysterious. "It's one of those things that point a dozen ways at once, Hal. Might prove something eventually, but probably not. We'll let you know—when we present you with a luscious murderess all prettily wrapped up in handcuffs."

"I can't wait," Garth said wryly.

This was the opening he'd been itching to find—a chance to leave. He swung out of the door with a wag of his hand and a pinch of dread in his heart. Johnny had found something, all right. Something that might actually lead him to Marda.

Garth drove rapidly, his hands restlessly

squeezing the wheel.

He had a date with Marda Seton. Only an hour ago he had been just one of her father's office boys, but now he was suddenly a little more important to her. Important enough for her to notice him now. Too important to brush off, even. So important, in fact, that she would think twice before giving him any kind of an argument—and then think better of it.

Garth's impulse was to head straight for the Victorian castle on Dorset Drive, in the city's snootiest section, which was the residence of District Attorney Curtis Seton. He might begin reaching a private little understanding with Marda then and there. But he shook his head at himself. After all, he was holding a fistful of aces. If he sat tight with them she would very soon have to lead right into his hand.

Playing it cagey instead, Garth angled across the city toward his own address in a "modest" section.

OPENING his door, Garth stopped short, staring across his shabby little living room at Marda.

Her misty black eyes were on his and a shadow of a smile was playing across her mouth. In one hand she held a freshly filled, dripping shot glass. She had helped herself to his bargain-counter rye, not seeming to mind the change from Scotch—perhaps had helped herself a little too liberally. His cigs too. There were six rouge-stained stubs in the tray, showing that she had apparently come here straight from Lionni's apartment, and having persuaded the superintendent to let her in, had been waiting for him.

She lifted the glass to her lips for a small sip and said, "Join me, Hal?"

He closed the door quietly behind him, grinning. This little deal was going to work out all right. Yes, indeed, it was going to work out fine—for both of them.

Smiling and moving toward her, Garth marveled. In appearance she was no different now. She was still the poised patrician, still the finely bred young lady, sensitive and delicate. But in her eyes he could see hints of audacities he had never suspected before, and the curve of her lips seemed a lure daringly and provocatively offered.

"I thought you might have become suddenly allergic to men's apartments, Marda," Garth said.

Her lips curved a little more. "It depends on the man." Then her face grew dark. "Rex was such a cheap little stinker, really. When I went in tonight I happened to hear him laughing to one of his dolls over the phone about how he was playing me along just to get himself in solid with the district attorney's office. Of course that was more than I could take from such a common little rat. I think the city should thank me for eradicating him, don't you?"

Garth gazed at her levelly. "Don't kid yourself. It's still murder. But in a special case like this, naturally there would be a few concessions." He began smiling. "Don't you agree, Marda, that in such a very special case as this a few concessions should be made?"

As he stood with her shadowy smile reflecting his, Garth's phone rang. He brought it up and heard a familiar cool, slightly imperious voice. With his eyes on Marda he answered it, "Yes, Mr. Seton."

Flickers showed deep in the smoky darkness of Marda's eyes as Garth went on answering her father's questions.

"No, Mr. Seton, no leads so far. The cops will have a tough time of it, I'm afraid, finding the right woman. The way it looks to me now, sir, they'll probably never find her—although, of course, developments may change my mind about that. Yes, I'll give you the complete written report first thing in the morning. Good night, Mr. Seton."

Garth's smile was tighter when he replaced the phone. Marda proffered to him the drink she had tasted. He took it, his smile growing into a grin, and she poured another for herself.

She held it up as a toast and said softly, "Here's to crime, darling."

THE mist was already settling past the windows and the temperature outside was dropping toward freezing, making it the first cold day of the winter, when Garth stepped into District Attorney Curtis Seton's snug inner office next morning.

Garth was there in response to a summons from on high relayed through three secretaries. He was slightly red-eyed and shaky in contrast to Seton's starchy self-possession —and he'd been a little late on the job this morning too—but he wasn't worrying about it. He took no pains this morning, as he usually did, to act like a buck private confronting a five-star general as he listened to Seton's pronouncement on the Lionni case.

"We'll simply wait for the police to produce a murderess, if they can, Hal. No doubt it will add up to another signal failure for them. If so, we'll want no part of it."

"That's right," Garth agreed, pointedly omitting his usual "sir."

He smiled across the polished desk. Until now he had felt like a menial here, but no longer. The district attorney didn't know it yet, but a bright young man named Hal Garth was crowding up on him. For reasons unknown to Curtis Seton, Garth would soon enjoy a few unprecedented privileges. Possibly, to Curtis Seton's astonishment, Garth was about to be included on the Seton's choicest guest list. He would soon begin appearing at the lavish cocktail parties and sumptuous dinners given at the Seton home. Curtis Seton might protest that Hal Garth was hardly one of "their set," but Marda would insist.

This would be really only the beginning of a brilliant future for Hal Garth. Professionally, too, thanks to Marda. Why, there was really no limit to the rapid progress Garth might make in this office from now on. It might even be possible that before too long Garth himself might be officiating here in the district attorney's chair, giving an underling the same aloof kind of look that Curtis Seton was giving him now.

"Have you anything to add to your report, Hal?" Seton inquired.

Silent a moment longer, Hal Garth felt sorry for Seton. Seton tried to be a good guy, tried really hard. At moments when he unbent he seemed warm-hearted, generous, beamingly proud of his lovely daughter. The truth about her, if ever it should hit him, would be enough to break him up horribly, even enough to destroy him completely. The mere thought of it put a twinge of pity into Garth's heart. But of course Seton would never learn. As Garth was planning it, Marda willing, keeping Curtis Seton in ignorance would make it a pleasanter situation all around. Much pleasanter.

"No, nothing to add," Garth said.

As he left Seton's office one of the D.A.'s corps of secretaries informed him, "There was a phone call for you just now, Mr. Garth, from Sergeant Brand."

Johnny? Garth's nerves jerked. "Did he leave a message?"

"He said he's anxious to get in touch with you, although he didn't say what about."

Garth went to the phone on his desk, his pulse a little faster. The call he made reached directly across the street to Homicide's offices in police headquarters.

A gruff voice answered shortly, "Johnny left a minute ago. No, didn't say where he was heading."

DISCONNECTING, Garth thought hard about that unknown piece of evidence which Johnny had found under Lionni's cooling corpse. It might add up or it might not, Johnny had said—but either way, he must be working on it now. With all the dogged zest in him Johnny would trace that evidence as far as the job could be pushed—which might mean as far as Marda Seton.

The back of Garth's mind had swarmed with speculations about that evidence all through a restless night, and now, again, he was left in chilling uncertainty. Not knowing what the evidence was, he couldn't guard himself and Marda against the potential danger in it. Until he learned where that evidence might be leading Johnny, he couldn't even guess how to try to stymie him. Garth's next move was urgent—to find out about that evidence and, if possible, neutralize it.

Garth strode from the D.A.'s office without leaving word as to where he was bound or when he would be back. The mist was lower, thick and biting cold in the street, as he crossed to police headquarters. He pushed into a rear door of Homicide's suite and found most of the squad out.

An older officer, a veteran near the retirement age whose job was all paper work, looked up at Garth with a twinkle of wel-

come in his eyes. "Pop" Chase, a sort of father confessor to all headquarters, was far too mellowed to share the inter-departmental rivalries of his "boys."

"Look, Pop." Garth tried not to sound too worried. "Got any idea what Johnny wants to see me about?"

"Why, yes, laddie," Chase said paternally. "He was talkin' to me about it only a little while ago. It's about a piece of evidence in the Lionni killin'."

Garth asked with burning tenseness, "What about it, Pop?"

"Johnny was a little sorry over the way he acted about it last night, laddie. Havin' thought it over, he figures that since you're the one who found the corpse, he shouldn't've held out on you like that. He thinks you and him ought to work along together on it."

Garth said next, trying to conceal the tightness of his nerves, "Okay, Pop—but did he mention what that evidence consists of?"

"That he did, m' lad. It's just a lady's dainty little handkerchief. No initials on it, y' understand, no marks at all, but just a little perfume. A very fine bit of linen with the scent of a lovely garden on it."

Garth's mind began running over and over it. A handkerchief. Fine linen. Expensive perfume—no doubt a fragrance as distinctive as money could buy. Marda's . . . Johnny Brand had actually, literally, picked up her scent.

His nerves growing hotter, Garth asked, "What is Johnny planning to do with it, Pop?"

"Trying to trace it, of course—admittin' he'll need a lot of luck. Y' see, he figures the handkerchief alone can't mean anything, but the woman who lost it must have others exactly like it, havin' prob'ly bought 'em by the box or the dozen. Chances are thin, Johnny says, but if he can manage to find that same perfume on a woman who owns more handkerchiefs like the one left under Lionni—why, then, Johnny will have himself a murderess."

Garth forced a laugh. "So what's Johnny going to do, Pop—stand around on street corners, sniffing every woman who passes by?" He laughed again. "Better warn him to watch out he doesn't pick up a cold in the nose, Pop. That would clog up the wheels of justice for fair."

GARTH kept the laugh going until he was outside Homicide's offices. Then the strained grin dropped off his face. Johnny had something to work on, all right—something that might come to nothing—but on the other hand a mere whiff of flowery air could turn it instantly into dynamite.

Under ordinary circumstances Johnny might never wander close to Marda Seton—but it need happen only once. If by some ironic freak of luck Johnny should happen into the D.A.'s suite at a time when Marda had dropped in—if some ghastly trick of fate should bring Marda near Johnny anywhere at all for a casual passing—!

Garth was striding rapidly along the downstairs hall of police headquarters. He meant to fix it so that Johnny would never catch a single deadly whiff of that fragrance near Marda, never find a duplicate of that handkerchief in her possession. Johnny's evidence would add up to exactly zero after Garth had told Marda to dump that perfume and burn the linen.

Garth sidled into a phone booth near headquarters' entrance. A grim sort of jubilation was back in his heart as he dialed a number and said, "Miss Marda Seton, please."

A maid's voice answered, "Sorry, sir, but Miss Marda is out."

Garth's confident smile faded. "This is important. Where can I reach her?"

"She didn't say where she was going, sir."

"When will she be back?"

"She didn't say, sir."

Garth said in clipped syllables, "I'll call again," and hung up.

He pushed out of the booth in a cold flush of anger. Good Lord, was Marda so sure of herself as all that—to go out of reach at a time when she should be keeping herself on her toes every minute for any message, any warning that he might flash to her?

Swinging out of headquarters, Garth reminded himself that there was no reason to get panicky so fast. The only danger was that Johnny and Marda might somehow come near each other, but so far it was a chance in a million. The odds against it

would hold, Garth felt sure, until he got a warning word through to Marda.

Back in the D.A.'s domain, he intended to sit tight—but as he wound his way to his desk the same secretary flagged him.

"Johnny Brand called again, Mr. Garth. Said he wants to connect with you as soon as possible."

Garth's patience suddenly tightened to the snapping point. Johnny's attempt to reach him could mean that that damned evidence was really building up. Johnny might have checked the choicest downtown shops and found one that stocked those extra-fine linens—and if so, of course, it was one having the name of Seton among its charge accounts. Johnny's enthusiastic sleuthing struck Garth full of uncertainties again, put him under pressure to find Marda fast.

He answered the secretary sharply, "Next time Johnny calls, tell him he'll find me at my apartment. I'll be waiting for him there."

He strode out again. Tooling his car out of the official parking space, he only half noticed the bite of the mist and the frozen spots on the pavement. A sudden spinning of his rear wheels warned him that a film of ice was making driving conditions hazardous, but his mind remained on the greater unknown hazard of Johnny Brand's sleuthing—and on Marda. Using his apartment phone while waiting for Johnny to show, he could try again, in safe privacy, to find her.

Garth slowed his car to squeeze past the construction work on the Canal Street Bridge. He was taking the last turn to his apartment when a signal light flickered on the dashboard and a bell purred.

HAL GARTH reached for the telephone. This was one of Curtis Seton's innovations—mobile phones in the cars of all his staff members so that he might command them night and day, even when they were in transit from one ordinary wired phone to another. This one, operating via short wave, made Seton almost inescapable.

"Mr. Garth," a secretary's voice said. "Mr. Seton would like to know why you left your desk."

Garth snapped, "Official business," and clicked the instrument back on its hook.

He was still fuming over Seton's nagging officiousness when he parked his car in front of his apartment. He strode rapidly down the hall, fishing for his key—and stopped short. His door had opened before him and Marda was slipping out.

"Hal," she said softly. "At last, darling. I've been waiting for you, hoping you'd come. It's been so lonely."

He stepped closer, smiling. They were alone in the hall. There was no one to see him sliding his arms around her. The hall stayed empty to the end of their long kiss. Marda's lips left his lingeringly.

"Not lonely any more?" Garth said, grinning. "Come right back in and let's—"

Her hands tightened on his arm, keeping his hand away from the knob. "No, darling, not now. Let's—let's go someplace. After all, people will have to begin seeing us together." She kissed him quickly again and tugged him away from the door. "Besides, I have a wonderful plan to tell you about—a really marvelous plan, darling."

Her eagerness wasn't to be denied. He went with her back to his car. Her cheeks were hotly flushed, he saw, and she shook her smoky hair free in the cold wind. As he turned the car from the curb, Marda slid snugly close to his side and closed both her hands on his arm.

As he drove carefully, feeling the dangerous slickness of the ice-film on the street, he said, "That's a lovely perfume you're wearing. Really delightful—and dangerous. There was some of it on the handkerchief you dropped in Lionni's parlor last night."

She was silent, dreamy-eyed, with her head resting on his shoulder.

"Hear me, Marda? You've got to get rid of that perfume fast. Those extra-fine handkerchiefs of yours too. Burn every one of them right away. Marda, listen. I'm trying to tell you—"

"Let's not think about that any more, darling," Marda put in quickly. "I've been thinking about *us* all night and all day. It's not good, having to wonder all the time whether they'll find out about us—wondering and never being quite sure."

"That's one thing about murder, my lovely," Garth said laconically. "You can get to

worrying about it."

Her hand began tightening on his arm. "But let's get away from it—let's go away together, darling. Let's go as far, far away from it as we can possibly go—today, right now. Oh, let's, darling!"

"A very attractive idea," Garth said wryly.

She seemed not to be listening. "Isn't it strange, darling. Only a few days ago we hardly knew each other, but suddenly you're everything to me—everything life can be. There's nothing I want more than to go away with you to a place where we can be the only two people on earth. Let's start right now, this very minute!"

Garth felt the ceaseless flexing of her fingers on his arm and an uneasiness crept into his mind. "That would make it a little sudden, wouldn't it?"

"But why not, darling! It's what I've always yearned to do—to run away to the end of the world with the man I love. We'll have such a lovely life together, forgetting everything except having each other. No worries at all, just sun and sea-breezes and lazy fun. As for making a living, you won't even have to think about that. I've lots of money, you know. We'll just take along all the money we'll ever need. There's nothing to hold us back, darling, really nothing."

Then the signal light flashed again on the dashboard. Marda didn't notice it. As Garth reached for the handset she went right on talking.

". . . . a beautiful place in the tropics, darling. Let's just turn right at the next corner and head straight for our own private paradise together."

IN THE phone a secretary's voice said, "District Attorney Seton calling, Mr. Garth. Hold on." Then, quickly, Seton's own voice followed crisply. "Garth? What do you know about Sergeant Johnny Brand?"

Watching the slippery street, Garth answered, "Nothing, sir. Haven't seen him today."

"You're certain you haven't, Garth?"

"Certainly, sir." With growing tension Garth asked, "What's happened?"

"He's dead."

The wind flowing in the open window felt suddenly, sharply colder on Garth's face. When his voice came back he said incredulously, "He can't be!"

"Johnny Brand is dead, Garth—murdered." District Attorney Seton's words sounded mercilessly precise. "Now I must ask you again, what do you know about it?"

"Nothing! Why do you insist on asking—"

"Because he was murdered in your apartment."

Garth sat silent and very still. His face was cold with the wind pouring over it, yet a fever was growing inside him. He was hotly conscious of Marda's closeness at his side, of her slender fingers kneading the flesh of his arm, of her lovely head resting on his shoulder.

"In my—"

"Exactly, Garth. He was found there only a few minutes ago. The janitor had gone up to see about an overflowing washbowl. Johnny Brand was dead on your living room floor, his head broken by a liquor bottle, and the water in that bowl was red with blood. Can you explain this, Garth?"

Garth forced out, "No, sir!"

"Nevertheless, I'm expecting you here in my office at the soonest possible moment."

"I'm heading that way now, sir." Sensing that Seton was about to sever the connection, Garth added quickly, "By the way, sir, I have your daughter here in the car with me. Just happened to pick her up."

"That so?" Seton sounded as if he disapproved of the company his daughter was keeping. "Well, please drive very carefully, Garth. Traffic conditions look very bad. I wouldn't want anything to happen."

"No, sir," Garth said acridly. "You wouldn't want anything to happen—to her."

Hanging up, he put both hands back on the wheel, gripping hard. Marda's head still rested on his shoulder. That dreamy, faraway look remained in her smoky eyes. She seemed unaware of the call from her father, unaware of everything except her misty visions.

"Our own private paradise together, darling," she murmured, "It will be really heaven—because I love you so much—more

than life itself."

His hands crushing the wheel, Garth knew it was a shameless lie. She cherished him as a means of escape, that was all. He had thought he had her trapped and suddenly he saw that he was, instead, another of her victims—her dupe. This lovely patrician creature was in fact a merciless destroyer, a woman of secret evils, who could be aroused in an instant to maniacal furies. She had killed not merely once but twice—twice within twelve hours. And God help Garth, she would kill again. Her killing might never stop.

HE KNEW clearly what had happened. Johnny, going to his apartment, had found Marda already waiting there. It was the one-in-a-million chance that had brought the detective straight to the hunted woman's scent—a meeting that Garth himself had unwittingly arranged. A very distinctive, very expensive scent it was that Johnny had found there, rising no doubt from another of Marda's fine linen handkerchiefs—and a very deadly one. Marda's blind, insane attempt to save herself from him had left Johnny lifeless, of all places, on Garth's own rug.

"You crazy fool!" he blurted. "You can't run away from it. You can't run fast enough or far enough to get away from this!"

Marda lifted her head from his shoulder. "But, Hal, darling, we've got to try. We've nothing to lose by trying, darling. And if we make it we'll have each other for always. It will be heaven for us together."

He knew then, suddenly, that the only real way out was to kill her. Her nearness was like a fever in him as he decided it. To him no woman on earth could ever be more vitally desirable—but she was an evil thing and he knew he must kill her now.

"Maybe you're right after all, Marda," he said.

This was something that couldn't be hushed up now. With Marda remaining within the law's reach, her father could never survive it. Not that Garth particularly favored the elegant Curtis Seton, of course, but still he scarcely deserved destruction at the delicate bloodied hands of the daughter he adored.

Marda wasn't thinking of her father now, of course, or of Garth either, or of anything except saving her own lovely hide.

Garth knew that they could never make it, but he said, "Yes, maybe you're right after all, Marda, my darling. First turn to the right, you said?"

He had already sent the car spurting up the ramp of the Canal Street Bridge, its rear wheels spinning with a buzz-saw whir. The construction work directly ahead, on the right, was the repair of a railing broken only a few days ago by a car that had skidded and crashed through to the railroad tracks thirty feet below. The ice on the pavement was sending Garth's car into a wild series of yaws even before he twisted the wheel violently to the right.

"Let's go, darling!" he howled. "Right now!"

Marda screamed. Her words rang in Garth's ears, "No, no, not this way!"

The car jolted with the first impact and wooden braces exploded in jagged fragments past the windshield. Marda's arms clasped Garth in frantic tightness—more tightly than ever before—as the car plunged free.

Destination Hell—together. • • •

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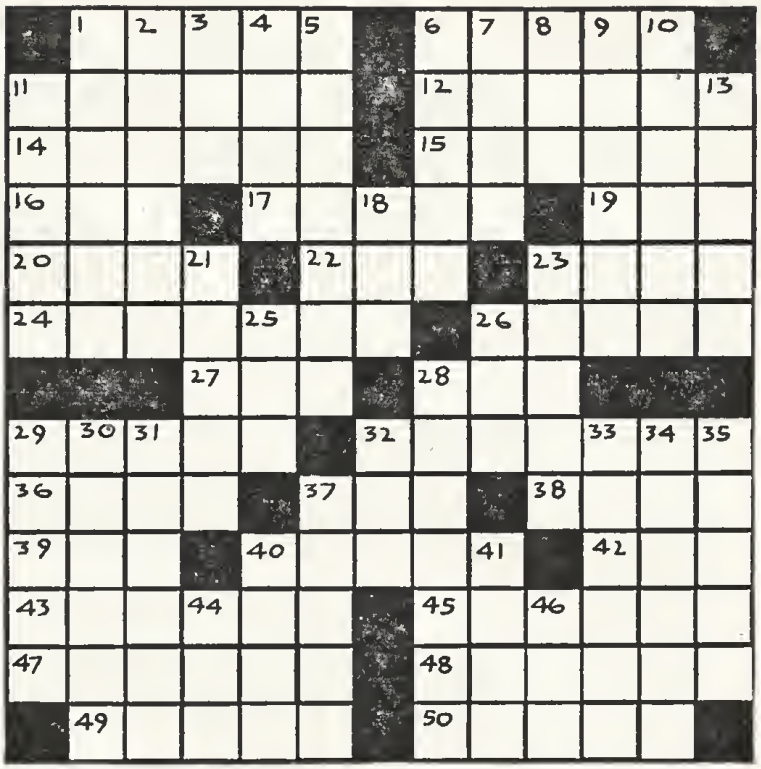
DETECTAGRAM

by A. F. Schroeder, Jr.



ACROSS

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6. Measured by the sun
11. Revolver
12. Idolized
14. Louisiano college
15. Person who tokes unlowfully
16. Atlontic (abbr.)
17. To do this illegolly is burglory
19. Rubber tree
20. Nook (Scot.)
22. Pickpocket
23. Sectian blocked off by police
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28. Extinct bird
29. Imprisans
32. Reloted to creaking noise on Inner Sanctum
36. Containers for humon oshes
37. The sun
38. Focility
39. Woter barrier
40. Intolerant person
42. Man's nickname
43. Corved
45. Virtuous
47. The prisoner wos —— his lost meol
48. Norcotics squod looks for this
49. Electric choirs
50. Medicinal leoves

DOWN

1. Disturber of public peoce
2. Prisoner entering insanity pleo moy end up here
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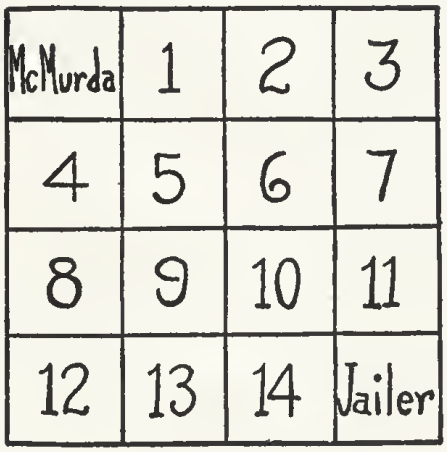
10. Drunkord
11. Vehicle for escope
13. Feor
18. It is (contr.)
21. Commits homicide
23. Informed
25. Netherland's river
26. Coost town af Formosa
28. Austrolion lizords
29. Court officiol
30. Brozilion mocows
31. Resident of penitentiory
32. Follaw closely
33. Assistant to Sherlock Holmes
34. Wont of oppetite
35. Arob kingdom
37. Confesses
40. Crooked
41. Old pronoun
44. By way of
46. Alder tree (Scot.)



JAIL BREAK!

Killer McMurda, along with the fourteen other members of his gang, was finally caught and incarcerated in this block of cells. McMurda's cell was at the upper left; the jailer's room at the lower right. Each of the other fourteen cells contained one of the gang.

How McMurda obtained a knife and a set of cell keys we do not know—but he did, and with them he managed to effect his escape, killing the old jailer on the way out. In passing, too, he settled some old scores by entering each cell and bumping off every one of his fourteen associates. Each one died instantly, and his body was left lying in his own cell.

Now, we know McMurda to be a man of delicate sensibilities —certainly not the kind of man who would enter a room wherein lay a dead man.

What puzzles us then is this: what route did McMurda take in entering each cell *once* and killing its occupant finally to reach the doomed jailer's room and escape?

Image of a Man

by GRAHAM DOAR

Every minute—sleeping or waking—the horror in his mind opened wider the door for death

THROUGH the open window of the sickroom, he felt, with part of him, the close, dead heat of the August night. He smelled, faintly and as if from far away, the sour, medicinal smell of the room, the invalid odor that had grown familiar and more hateful with the passing months.

It was black dark, and a smothering blanket of weariness lay on him, but the drive of his terror was greater than his weariness, greater than the blinding agony that stabbed through him every time he tried to move.

Then he knew he was dreaming. The dream had caught him, and with a faint sigh he surrendered himself wholly to it. This was the dream. . . .

It had to be tonight. He had to make it tonight or it would be never. He strained, and the pain lanced his breast so that he almost screamed aloud. But he choked it off and struggled, finally, to a sitting position. He had to keep his head bent to keep from scraping the top of the box in which he lay.

He gritted his teeth and clenched both hands on the cold metal of the shaft where it protruded from his body just under the breastbone. He pulled. Agonizingly the needle that spitted him moved, slid, caught horribly, slid again and came free. He dropped it to the bottom of the box, careless in his sudden relief of the small rattle it made. Then he thought, and the thought

caught his breath and his freed heart leaped painfully. Suppose *she* was there. In the kitchen. Suppose she heard.

Miraculously, the pain that had bound him was gone now. He had no great strength, but he managed to get to his knees. Arching his back against the lid of the box, he straightened and raised it. There was a light in the kitchen. It fell through the three-inch gap of the open pantry door right across the shelf, missing his box by inches. At least, he was in shadow. He waited.

He heard her moving about, humming lightly, sometimes muttering to herself—a beastly habit she had—and it seemed ages. She might come into the pantry at any minute. But she didn't and at last, she turned out the light and went away.

He pulled himself up, threw one leg over the edge of the box, and dropped to the shelf. He looked curiously at his erstwhile prison. As he had guessed from the odor, it was a cigar box. It had held his own brand, the ones he used to smoke before the doctor made him stop. How like her. "Waste not, want not," she would say and nod her small head sagely.

The broom was where he remembered it, leaning against the shelves. He reached it quickly, slid down and at last, stood erect upon the floor. For the first time he began to believe in the possibility of escape. Until this moment, it had been simply his terror driving him, the awful, hopeless terror that had lived in him for months. The terror was still there, but now it was accompanied by a new thing—hope.

He stole across the kitchen floor, feeling its coldness under his bare feet, feeling no surprise at seeing the familiar furniture towering, shadowy in the half-light, high over his head. The gleaming porcelain of the humming refrigerator was an Everest, bulking whitely beyond the limit of his vision; the chairs, the table loomed immense, frightening. Naturally, he was tiny. There could have been only so much wax in the house and, besides, a small one was easier for her to handle—and to hide.

The one open window, the knob of the door was as much beyond his reach as if they existed in another world, another dimension. As, indeed, they did.

But he had his route planned. He'd thought about it so long, lying in agony through the long nights, gathering his feeble strength to make this one last attempt. The cat door, the arched panel, free swinging, she'd had cut in the kitchen door for the convenience and whim of the enormous black and evil beast that was her constant companion. Her *familiar*? Likely enough.

He was through the door now, and the night was black and deep and warm about him, a refuge. He tumbled helter-skelter down the high stair and lay panting at the bottom. Near him—close, terribly close—he felt movement, saw a shadow blacker than the black night. There was a heart-chilling, questing "Miaou-ou?" The cat. The great, red-throated, black son of Satan, the cat. He lay trembling, paralyzed by this new terror.

The shadow made a silent rush, and his heart stopped, sickeningly. Then the beast was past him, leaping up the stairs, and was gone through the little door.

After a while, his strength came back, and he got up. Stumbling, scampering, crawling, he battled his way across the short-cropped grass of the lawn and came at last to the tree that he had visioned as sanctuary. He circled the huge bole to the north side.

It had to be north. Otherwise the sun, beating down during the day through the spreading branches, would strike the wax of his body and melt him away.

This, too, could mean death. A gentler death, a slower, kindlier death than the sharp and shining needle she had driven through his body, but death nevertheless. Death was to be avoided.

On the north side of the tree, he burrowed down among the roots, working like a mole into the earth until he was entirely covered. Then, at ease, the pain, the wrenching terror having subsided, he lay at peace. Now it was safe for him to close his tiny waxen eyes, and—sleep. . . .

HE AWOKE. The August sun was streaming through the window, hot even now at this early hour. Sweat stood in trembling droplets on his brow, and he felt

tired, as though he had been running or—digging?

But it was a good morning. He felt relaxed for a change, at ease in his mind; and the pain, the terrible knife-like pain just under his breastbone was gone. He wondered— But no, he wouldn't try to get up today. In this heat and with the bad spell he'd had only yesterday, it would be taking too much of a chance.

His wife came into the room, fresh and clean and sparkling in a bright print dress, carrying the basin of warm water, the soap and washcloth. She was an excellent nurse. She was a good housekeeper, too, a good wife. Busy and bright about her household duties, always cheerful and smiling as she tended her invalid husband. Who could ask for anything more?

She could. She could ask for more, and there was the rub. He lay in bed through the days or sat in a chair on the screened-in porch; he stared into the blackness of his room on the bad nights—and he thought. He thought about all the things she could ask for that he couldn't—not ever now—give her.

She bent above his bed and began to unbutton the jacket of his pajamas. "Have a good night, dearest? You're looking rested, I think."

"Not—not too bad. I—I dreamed a lot. But the pain's gone this morning, and that always helps."

"Good. Oh, good. Do you think—would you like to try the porch for awhile today?"

Her hands, the damp grateful cloth were busy on his body. "No," he said, "I don't think so. The heat—and it might bring the pain back. No, I'll just lie here."

Finished, going out, she turned at the door. "It's nice you're so much better. I was afraid—after you had such a bad day yesterday. I'll have your breakfast in a few minutes."

He lay, refreshed after his bath, and thought about his dream. He read too much. Lying here helpless, with nothing else to do, he read too much and was not, perhaps, always wise in his choice of subject. All those fantastic tales of witches and warlocks, demons of the earth and air, elemental evil in conflict with, and frequently victorious over, the good—perhaps they reacted too strongly on a sick man's mind. She read them, of course, but she was young and strong and vital. Such sick fancies could never touch the blitheness of her spirit.

Or could it be that she believed in these evil things? That she wanted *him* to believe also? Could that be why she brought him these books?

Nonsense. Listening, he could hear the melody she hummed lightly and sweetly as she went about her work. He heard her open the pantry door and go in. So many days he'd lain here and listened that now he could tell by the sound of her footsteps just where in the house she was, even what part of which room. She was in the pantry now, and he could hear her talking to herself—an endearing trait she had.

SHE came to the bedroom door, a little frown on her slim oval face under the shock of midnight hair. "Dear," she said, "it's silly, I know, but did you go into the pantry for anything lately?"

He raised his brows. "Why, darling, I don't think I've been in the pantry since we moved into the house. Why?"

"Nothing. I mean—it's silly but—" she went away, and he knew the last words were addressed to herself— "I could have sworn it was right there yesterday."

He thought again about his dream and when she brought his soft eggs on the tray, he dabbled listlessly at the runny, golden yolks. Apologetically he said, "I—I'm afraid to eat much. The pain might come back." He nibbled a bit of the toast and the coffee was good, hot and strong. But he was allowed only one cup.

He didn't read that morning but lay and argued with himself. At nine, he heard her phone in her grocery order for the day.

". . . frozen peas and a can of mushroom soup—make it two cans. And ten pounds of sugar, Mr. Wright, and, oh, I need another box of paraffin—you know, the wax, like for . . . Yes, that's it. . . . Yes, I know I did but a part of that box got lost somehow. . . . Thank you, Mr. Wright, and as early as you can, please."

He felt all right. His heart was beating a little fast but, after all, it was his heart that was wrong with him.

Wax *can* get lost, like anything else. Like—like souls. No, no, like—well, like anything around a house. Besides there are a lot of things a housekeeper uses wax for. Otherwise, grocers wouldn't stock it.

She came in at ten and said it was such a nice day and she had time on her hands and she was going to fix him up "pretty." He was nervous and irritable under her hands as she shaved him and trimmed his hair and even clipped his fingernails. There was something very close to horror in his eyes when she gathered up and bore away these little bits of him, this essence. She was so efficient, so gentle, so calm and loving. How could evil exhibit so fair a countenance?

No! No, it was the dream. He was thinking too much about the dream. That had to stop. He heard the boy come with the groceries and go away and he pictured her in the kitchen, dark head bent over the pliant wax, slim face intent and serious, crooning as she worked. No!

She began to hum, lightly.

He called her in and persuaded her that he must have a nap. He was exhausted, he said, utterly worn out. She gave in and got him one of the capsules. At least, it should insure no dreams.

IT WAS the phone ringing that woke him. That and the rapid patter of her footsteps as she hurried to answer it. She lifted the receiver to stop the ringing, then stepped to the bedroom door to glance at him before she answered. He pretended to sleep. She pitched her voice low.

"Yes, Naomi. Yes. He's sleeping. . . . Oh, are you? So am I. In fact, I was planning to finish it today—get the whole thing out of the way once and for all. But when I looked in the pantry this morning the—the paraffin was gone. And I had everything all ready. Of course, I ordered some more but it was hours and it means starting all over again. And you know how I hate waiting around."

He was still a little dopy from the effect of the capsule but he couldn't miss the meaning of this. So she was planning to finish it today? So it meant starting all over? Yes, he knew how she hated waiting around.

Well, she'd wait no longer.

Strangely, as he moved across the room to his dresser, his legs felt stronger than they had for some time. His heart was thundering horribly, but he forced it down with an effort of will. For a little time—for just this much time—he was willing to gamble that his heart would last.

The gun was still in the drawer.

When he stepped through the doorway she'd just hung up the phone and was starting back to the kitchen. God, it made an awful lot of noise!

AFTERWARD, his throat was dry, and his head hurt. His ears rang with the sound of the shots, and his hand had no strength to hold the pistol. It dropped with a thud to the carpet.

Carefully, edging past her body and keeping one hand against the wall, he went out into the kitchen for a drink.

The cat, black and monstrous, came in through his little door and paused suddenly, head up, back slightly arched. It spat at him, then turned and vanished through the door again.

He had finished his glass of water and was, with shaking hand, putting down the glass when his bemused mind finally took in what his eyes had seen long since.

The huge kettle, with the wooden stirring spoon in it, bubbling on the electric stove, filling the kitchen with a heady, sugary scent; the little pot of melted paraffin. On the kitchen table, standing neatly, primly, on carefully disposed sheets of newspaper, row on row of gleaming, ready jelly glasses waiting to be filled. • • •

FOR OTHER THRILLING STORIES READ
5 DETECTIVE NOVELS ★ TRIPLE DETECTIVE

Travel with Detective Sam Barber

THROUGH THE EYE OF HOMICIDE

"Do you want this in your face?" he asked, holding the molten metal at arm's length

By O. B. MYERS

DAN BARBER shoved a battered notebook in his side pocket, clapped a soft hat on his head, and pulled the door of his office shut behind him, all in one sweeping motion. On the frosted

glass panel of the door neat black letters spelled out MISSING PERSONS.

His long-legged stride took him the length of the corridor to the steel-grilled elevator shafts. Glancing at them with faint contempt, he clattered carelessly down two flights of slate-paved stairs and out into the street. Whistling softly under his breath, he made his way through the din of downtown traffic and the crowded sidewalks with a kind of loose, angular grace.

After a couple of blocks he turned a corner, and shortly after that ran up half a dozen steps to enter an arched doorway. In a cavernous hall paneled in dingy oak, he was met by a penetrating odor of strong antiseptic and a short pudgy man wearing an unbuttoned vest and no necktie. The man blinked, grunted an unintelligible greeting, and went on about his business. Dan turned into a small but high-ceilinged office on the left.

"Morning, Sam! What's new?"

The clerk behind the cluttered desk had wispy gray hair, sallow cheeks, and doughy bags under his eyes. He looked at Dan, shrugged a greeting, and pulled a typewritten sheet of paper under his hand. He ran a nicotine-stained forefinger down the first column.

"Number seventy-four," he croaked. "He's been peeled, and Fred Stamm is in there now."

Dan waved a vague gesture of thanks, and swung back into the long corridor. Near the rear end he passed through a door that closed automatically behind him with a whispering hiss. The room had no windows, but the blue-white glare of fluorescent lights was reflected coldly from the white-tiled walls, in which was set tier upon tier of nickel-trimmed square doors, like an endless succession of gargantuan filing cabinets. The stillness made the reek of formaldehyde seem all the stronger.

A double row of high, marble-topped tables ran down the center of the room. These were all empty and spotlessly clean except one.

On that one lay a naked corpse.

"Hello, Dan," said Fred Stamm. "Nice morning."

FRED was a solid, heavy-shouldered detective from headquarters with a bristling blond mustache and extremely white teeth. At the moment he was mining the latter with a quill toothpick for the last traces of his breakfast.

Dan pulled out his notebook and leafed through until he came to a blank page, then hunted his pockets for a pencil.

"Homicide interested in this one?" he asked.

Fred grunted. "A guy don't knot a clothesline around his neck and jump in the river by accident. It's bound to be either homicide or suicide—take your choice."

"What's yours?"

"It's murder, for *my* money. That rope was pulled tight, and there was no water in his lungs. He was dead before he went in."

"What do his clothes have to say?"

"Nothing. Not even a laundry mark in 'em. Pockets turned inside out. I don't think the suit was made in this country. He looks a bit like a foreigner, don't you think?"

Dan had been putting off looking as long as possible. He had done his duty in the morgue often enough before, but had never gotten around to enjoying it. It was always unpleasant, sometimes worse.

Now he looked. The man was short, with a slim waist, but with wide, powerful shoulders and long, sinewy arms. His hands and face were weather-tanned, the rest of his skin a pasty, water-soaked gray. A red wheal of strangulation encircled his neck, and his mouth was half open, as if he were still struggling for breath.

Dan shrugged, and swallowed. It felt as if someone had pushed a goose egg down his throat and then drawn it up again. He hurried to note details on his blank page. Date, time, place. . . .

"East River?"

"Hudson," said Fred. "Pier 38, at dawn."

Race: white. Weight: 180. Hair: black, curly. Eyes . . .

The lids were lowered, showing only a line of white. Dan used the tip of his pencil, attempting to raise the left lid, but it seemed stubborn. Fred took his thumb to the other.

"Brown," he said. "Dark brown."

Dan wrote carefully.

"Say, let me take that pencil of yours a minute."

Fred held up one eyelid, and touched the eye beneath it with the point. Then he did the same to the other eye. The second time Dan heard a faint click.

"Well, I'll be damned," muttered Fred. "A glass eye. Nobody had noticed that before."

"A glass eye?" Dan gulped. "Are you sure?"

"Am I sure! Watch. I've seen my brother take his out often enough—I ought to know the trick."

He placed his two forefingers at either side of the socket, felt for the right spot, and pressed. The eye popped out in his hand.

"Eric's is hollow, with an opening. Well, come to look, so is this one. Only the opening is plugged."

Dan stared in curiosity, his skin prickling. The detective cupped the egg-shaped object in his palm, hiding its blank and icy stare, and hefted it appraisingly. The back surface curved inward to a depression, in which was stuffed a small wad of white paper.

"Seems kinda heavy," muttered Fred.

Using the point of the pencil, he plucked at the wad of paper until it was loose enough to lift out. He handed it to Dan, and sniffed curiously at the recessed opening, shaking his head.

He next tore a blank sheet from Dan's notebook and laid it flat on the adjoining table. Inverting the eye over it, he tapped gently on the marble. The painted pupil seemed to jiggle resentfully, but when he paused and raised his hand, in the middle of the sheet of blank paper was a small pile of reddish brown dust.

"Dust!" hissed Dan in disbelief. "How the devil would dust gather inside a man's glass eye?"

Fred's eyes narrowed. "It would be *put* there," he said slowly.

AFTER some moments of puzzled silence, Dan remembered that he was holding the paper plug in his hand. He uncrumpled it carefully, spread it flat with the heel of his hand. It was roughly triangular, evidently torn from the corner of a page, and was quite blank. He turned it over, and leaned forward to peer at four penciled figures.

"Nineteen-nine?" he muttered. "That couldn't have been in there since 1909, could it?"

Fred Stamm peered past his shoulder. "Wait a minute. Isn't that a dot, after the one?"

Dan nodded slowly. "Well, then—one-point-nine-oh-nine. Does that mean anything more to you?"

Fred shrugged, frowning, and continued absently to heft the glass eye in his fingers. Suddenly he stopped the small motion, and stared at the eye accusingly.

"Say!" he hissed, crinkling his brows.

"What?"

"This eye is a hell of a lot lighter than it was a few minutes ago."

Dan scowled. "So what?"

Fred made no reply, but looked about for some place to put it down where it wouldn't roll off and smash. He chose the navel of the corpse.

Then, using both hands, he gathered together the four corners of the notebook page on which lay the little mound of dust. Moving very carefully, he lifted it hardly more than half an inch from the table top, steadying himself with his elbows. He hefted it up and down in tiny movements, and his bleak blue eyes slid into the corners to peer appraisingly at Dan.

"So what?" repeated Dan.

"So it's funny, huh?"

Half an hour later Dan emerged from the Wall Street station of the subway and walked east. He had turned a couple of corners when the metallic scream of sirens echoed through the canyons of the downtown business district. He paused at the head of Old Slip.

Uniforms on motorcycles whirled past him. They were followed by an open car filled with men in plain clothes, each inconspicuously cradling a rapid-fire gun. Then more motorcycle cops, and on their heels two armored cars, the slitted windows defensively secretive, the drivers grim and intent. Another loaded touring car and a

final pair of motorcycles brought up the rear of the cavalcade.

Before the last one passed him, the first one had halted in front of the grim gray five-storied building on the north side of Old Slip. Men leaped from the motorcycles, others poured from the cars, to station themselves on the sidewalk and in the street. A high, iron-sheathed gate swung open, and two square-shouldered armored cars vanished into the maw of the alley. The gate clanged shut, but the guards remained posted.

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HOW MORBID ARE YOU

If you're curious about what actually goes on behind the locked doors and barred windows of penal institutions, don't think that you're morbil. It's a perfeetly natural, unoriginal interest that's always fascinated the peaceable, nonlawbreaking citizen. This is borne out by the faet that the wardens of the early 19th century English jails actually made a nice bit of pocket money by selling the details of confessions to loeal newspapers. Condemned men's last prayers, entreaties and curses also made nice copy that was good for cold eash.

The periodieals that printed these news items, like THE TERRIFIC REGISTER and THE MALEFACTOR'S JOURNAL, didn't mind shelling out the dough either, since sueh stories boosted their circulation tremendously. Many of the issues, as a matter of faet, sold more than 2,000,000 copies at a single clip.—Bess Ritter.

Dan strode down the block. A cop gestured at him.

"Other way, mister."

Dan fished out his police shield, and palmed it. The uniformed rider, gun in hand, jerked his head sideways.

"The precinct station is over there."

"Yeah, I know. But I'm headed for the assay office."

"Well, take the other side of the street," he growled, and then added in explanàtion, "It's a shipment of Federal bullion, from the piers."

DAN shrugged, crossed the cobbles, and a hundred feet farther on crossed back again. The only door of the U.S. Assay Office was of thick, bullet-proof glass, and opened into an unfriendly stone foyer flanked by a steel-grilled window. From behind the grating the face of a guard glared at him impassively.

Again Dan flashed his shield, but the guard only sneered.

"That cuts no ice here, brother. What's your business?"

Dan told him briefly.

"You carrying a gun?"

"My police pistol, yes."

"You'll have to park it here, my friend. Nobody gets in here with a gun—but nobody."

Dan snorted, and passed it through the grill. An inner door clicked. When he had passed through it, another guard escorted him through still another door into a wide corridor flanked by a counter surmounted by a steel mesh screen.

"Right over there, mister."

Dan moved to the counter and began fishing in his pocket. Behind the screen a couple of men in shirt sleeves were busy at several long, stone-topped tables littered with beakers, bottles, Bunsen burners, and glass-encased precision balances. At a desk facing the opposite wall, a girl shuffled a batch of papers.

When she rose and came toward him, Dan did a double take. She looked like someone you'd find in a night club rather than an office, especially a dry and dusty office like this. She had wide blue eyes, a pert red mouth, and golden blond hair that fell in soft waves to her shoulders. She moved as if she had a yen for dancing.

"Hello. What can I do for you?"

Her smile went up a little higher on one side than the other, giving an immediate expression of friendliness.

"I've got something here," said Dan, jiggling a plain sealed envelope. "Could I get someone to make a check on it for me?"

"Gold, you mean?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Certainly. I'll take care of it."

Dan's eyebrows jerked. "You?"

"Yes, me. Why not me? That's my job."

"Well—sure." Dan slid the envelope under the screen. "Will it take long?"

"No. Just a few minutes, probably."

She clipped the corner from the envelope

and slid its contents into a small platinum pan. This she carried to one of the tables, where she busied herself with a hand magnifying glass, bottles, and glass rods. She nodded, transferred the spoonful of dust to another pan, and moved to one of the delicate balances.

Dan watched her rather than what she was doing, since he didn't understand the latter anyway. She wore a loose, short-sleeved blouse with an H embroidered above the pocket. Her lashes were long and dark against her cheeks as she bent over the table, and when she walked her hair moved up and down with a little floating motion that suggested she was light on her feet.

She made some notations on a form, and then brought it over to the counter.

"Your name?"

Dan told her.

"Address?" She wrote quickly. "It comes to a little over sixty dollars. You can take this slip to the cashier. They'll give you cash, or send you—"

"Oh, no," said Dan. "I didn't mean to sell it. Only to find out if it was really gold, or not."

"Oh, I see. Then you want to take it out with you?"

"Yes, I'll have to."

She crumpled the slip in her hand, and drew one of a different color from a pigeonhole. After filling it out, she stapled it firmly to a fresh envelope in which she sealed his sample of dust.

"I'll have to come to the door with you," she smiled.

"That's fine," grinned Dan. "But why?"

"This is an easy place to carry gold into, but it's almost impossible to carry it out, even with a signed pass."

SHE stepped to a small access gate at the end of the counter and came out into the corridor. Here she almost ran head-on into a tall, slender man in a white apron who strode from the other direction. He had deep-set dark eyes and an upturned black moustache. The points quivered angrily as he glared at her.

"Miss Wayne! I am waiting for those reports."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Flandreau! I'll be just a few moments. I had to stop to handle this inquiry."

"Inquiry?"

There was disbelief in the knife-edge of his tone. He snatched the envelope from her hand and eyed the slip attached to it. He made a move to hand it back, then abruptly studied it again. His head turned slowly and he peered at Dan so long and intently that Dan started in that direction.

But then the man in the apron thrust the envelope back into the girl's hand, and with a hasty, "Very well, very well," made his way with an odd, stiff-legged stride back along the corridor and vanished into a door.

"Who's that bird?" asked Dan, as she came toward him.

"Oh—only my boss." She shrugged carelessly. "Mr. Flandreau, Armand Flandreau, one of the senior assay chemists. He's been here for years and years."

"He sounds as if he needs a vacation," muttered Dan, as they moved together toward the first door.

"No, it can't be that," she told him. "He had a long vacation only last summer, spent two months in France. Visited the small town where he was born, he told us when he came back."

"Then it's his disposition," grumbled Dan.

At the door Dan discovered the meaning of her remark about the difficulty of carrying gold out of the Assay Office. The precautions were fantastic.

Two different guards inspected his envelope, scrutinized the signature, and questioned his companion bluntly. Then, before giving him back his gun, they took down his name and shield number, the serial number of his driver's licence, and his social security number. Finally they passed him in front of an electromagneticscope which showed up on a screen every bit of metal on his person, which then had to be produced and identified.

"Want me to undress down to the skin?" asked Dan sarcastically as he slid his pistol into its holster.

At that, the blonde gave a little squeal, half embarrassed and half amused, and darted back into the corridor. But she re-

mained foremost in his thoughts while he made his way back to headquarters.

It was not until he pulled out the envelope and placed it on Fred Stamm's desk that he examined the signature himself.

"Holly Wayne," he murmured. "So that's it."

"What's that?" asked Fred.

"Nothing," said Dan hastily. "Say—look at this. It was gold, all right, and here's the weight. 1.909 ounces, exactly—and that's the same figure that was written on that piece of paper in the dead man's glass eye."

Fred peered at him narrowly, then snorted. "So what? He has a little gold, which he keeps in a safe place. With it he keeps track of the amount in ounces, so he won't get cheated when he sells. Obviously that's all that figure means."

Dan scowled. "Do you think he was murdered for his gold, and then the killer couldn't find it on him?"

"Sixty dollars worth?" grunted the detective. "No. That's pretty cheap for murder. There's some other reason behind his death, and when we know who he is—or was—we'll have a chance of figuring out that reason."

Dan nodded. "You get his fingerprints?"

"Before you got there, even. Our city files can't match 'em, but I've sent 'em to the F.B.I. in Washington."

Dan fingered the envelope thoughtfully. "This gold—it's a funny thing, eh, Fred?"

"Forget the gold, will you?" growled Fred. "Concentrate on his fingers and his teeth. Maybe you'll find out something."

DAN spent the rest of the day in the Missing Persons files upstairs, but could dig up no suggestion of a clue to the identity of the seedy unknown in the morgue. The contents of the glass eye, in spite of Fred Stamm's convictions, continued to color his thoughts, and late in the afternoon he sat down to the telephone.

It wasn't hard to get a list of the licensed dealers in the city. To each one he put the same inquiry.

"Have you sold 1.909 ounces of pure

[*Turn page*]

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gold lately?" He repeated the figure carefully. "One point nine oh nine ounces. Yes, examine your records, and if you have, let me know the name of the buyer. Police headquarters, Extension 282."

Before he left at five-thirty, he had three return calls. All three of them were flatly negative.

On the way home in the subway, he hunted through the evening paper until he found the paragraph he sought buried on page fourteen. The body of an unidentified man had been dragged out of the Hudson River. Age, about forty. Clothing, nondescript, apparently of foreign make. No clues. The police were investigating.

No mention of the glass eye, or its contents. Apparently Fred Stamm had kept that luscious detail from the reporters, or the article might have been more detailed.

Going back leisurely to the front page, his eye skimmed with faint interest a longer piece, headlined LOOT RECOVERED IN FRANCE.

Opening with a brief recapitulation of the daring holdup last summer of the Maragha of Allappoda, near his villa on the Riviera, and the loss of several million dollars worth of the Indian potentate's jewels, the latest development followed.

The French police arrested four men in Paris last week, notorious Apaches believed connected with the crime, but found no gems. Now a fifth robber has surrendered voluntarily in Peronne, claiming immunity by reason of a briefcase stuffed with diamonds and pearls.

A paragraph described brooches, rings, necklaces, and tiaras.

Worth well over a million dollars, these represent about two-thirds of the jewels stolen. Vigorous efforts are being made to force the conspirators to reveal the hiding place of the rest.

The "rest" was not specifically described.

Dan sniffed. The French police, as he well knew, had their methods, which the American police dared not emulate. Underworld characters had been known to emerge from the Surete, after turning State's witness, with one less arm than on entering.

He turned directly to the sports page.

The next morning in his office the phone started ringing before nine. But it didn't ring often. The list of legitimate dealers in gold was not long. In a great variety of accents, the reports all told him no.

It was close to the middle of the morning before the break came. A voice with a heavy Levantine accent slurred an unpronounceable name, followed by an address on Nassau Street.

"You are ze Polizei who ask about ze gold selling, yas?"

"That's right. One-point-nine-oh-nine ounces. You got a record of that amount?"

"Receipt, she is in my hand. Choosday, I sell her."

"Tuesday? Who bought it?"

"A dentist. Doctor Edwin Folsom. 531 West 113th Street."

Dan made quick notes. "What did he look like?"

"Ha! She is very pretty girl, I remember that."

"Girl! You mean the dentist was a woman?"

"No, he send his nurse, I t'ink. She is sign her name on receipt. It is not Folsom. It is—Holly Wayne."

"How do you spell— *What?*"

Dan listened to the gruff voice repeat the name, and spell it out. He wrote down the letters with a hand stiff as a board. After he had cradled the phone, he stared at them in blank amazement.

HOLLY WAYNE, dentist's assistant? Then it couldn't be the same one. Or could it? Why the devil would Holly Wayne, who worked in the Assay Office, be buying dental gold from a dealer? And the same amount as was later found in the glass eye of a corpse? Could she be tied in with a murder?

But wait a minute. She had bought her gold on Tuesday. The body was dragged from the river at dawn on Wednesday, but the medical examiner had estimated that it had been in the water three or four days. Then it couldn't be the same gold dust. But it was still the same amount, and a coincidence to the last thousandth of an ounce seemed too fantastic for belief. The more

he pondered it, the more confusing it became.

Dan crammed his notebook in his pocket and took the stairs to Homicide. Fred Stamm was not in his office.

"He said to tell you that you could forget that case that came out of the river yesterday. We got a teletype from Washington. The international F.B.I. files have got his fingerprints."

"Who was he?"

The clerk shuffled languidly through carbon copies. "Pedro Bletti, a Corsican. Member, sometimes leader, of a notorious European gang of robbers. Several arrests in France and Italy. Served four years in Lyons. Last reported in Marseilles."

Dan scribbled down the name. The details had no apparent significance as far as he could see.

"Where has Fred gone?"

"I don't know. He'll probably be back later."

Dan left the office in as much of a fog as he had entered it. Officially, his responsibility ended with the identification of the corpse. The ramifications of murder and motive were a matter for Homicide, not Missing Persons.

The résumé of Pedro Bletti's career was interesting, but gave no clue to the gold dust hidden in his eye, though it doubtless had some bearing on his murder. That gold, nevertheless, and the precise coincidence of quantities, gripped Dan's curiosity more than ever, particularly as it involved Holly Wayne, and he headed for the subway instead of for his own office.

The Assay Office loomed massive and forbidding, seeming to lean threateningly over the narrow sidewalks of Old Slip. The first guard, behind the barred window, gave him a gleam of recognition.

"You again? Got that pistol on you?"

Dan handed it over. He passed through the first door, then the second door, and stepped to the counter. An elderly man with a wart on his lower lip faced him.

"Miss Holly Wayne?"

"She's only out here occasionally. She's with Mr. Flandreau this morning. Can I do something for you?"

[*Turn page*]

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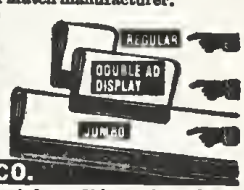

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"No, thanks. Only Miss Wayne. Could you call her?"

Wart-lip looked doubtful, but then shuffled to a telephone on the desk. He spoke into it briefly, then nodded toward Dan and went back to work at a precision balance.

In hardly more than a minute she came along the corridor. Silhouetted against the oblong of a high, distant window, her shining hair floated up and down with a light little movement. Her high heels clacked briskly on the terrazzo floor.

"Oh! It's you!" Her slightly crooked smile was not displeased. "Have you brought some more gold for me to weigh for you?"

"No," said Dan, and then paused, staring at her. Her scarlet lips, half parted, underlined a pert little nose that gave her an appearance of childish innocence. But Dan, with a certain amount of experience touching on the most fantastic crimes, had learned not to trust appearances.

Lucrezia Borgia was beautiful, too.

SHE turned her head a little way, toward the counter, and then slid her eyes into the corner to observe him mockingly.

"We're not supposed to have personal visitors, here."

"It's not that," said Dan, unsmiling. "Not this time. I wanted to ask you some questions about some gold you bought yourself, day before yesterday. 1.909 ounces of gold, in fact."

Her smile faded. "How do you know about that?"

Dan held her eyes with his. "I'm from the police, you know."

"Yes, I know. I saw them give you back your gun yesterday."

The knowledge didn't seem to disturb her.

"We know quite a lot of things. There are others we would like to know, but don't. About that gold you bought, for instance."

Without lowering her eyes she snapped her fingers softly, in a gesture of recollection. "It just struck me. The amount is the same as you brought in here, isn't it? I handle so many small quantities, I usually never remember the figures, of course."

"That's what struck me, too," said Dan.

"You mean—it was the same gold?" Her brows puckered. "That you got it from Dr. Folsom, and traced it back?"

"Not exactly. Perhaps you'd better start at the beginning, and tell me how it came about."

"Why, Mr. Flandreau asked me to buy it."

Dan concealed his surprise with difficulty. "Mr. Flandreau!"

"Yes, my boss, you know. He explained why. It's quite legitimate. Dr. Folsom lives in the apartment next to him, up on 113th Street, and they're acquainted. The doctor's nurse is on vacation, and he is tied up with appointments all day long. So, knowing Mr. Flandreau's occupation, he asked if he could get some for him. Mr. Flandeau told him, of course, that he couldn't buy it *here*, but that he'd be glad to get some for him from a dealer. So the doctor gave Mr. Flandreau a bill-head and the money. He gave it to me, and I left the office a little early on Tuesday to make the purchase."

"What did you do with the gold then?"

"Mr. Flandreau met me at the subway station, and I gave it to him."

Dan thought hard. "So it never had to come in *here?*"

"That's right. It would have been difficult for Mr. Flandreau to carry it out, even in his position."

"What did he do with it? Did he give it to Dr. Folsom?"

"I don't know. I suppose so."

Dan eyed her sternly. "Why did he want that exact amount?"

"I don't know that either. Perhaps Dr. Folsom just happened to give him that much money."

Dan scowled. The story sounded all right at far as she was concerned, but he felt that there was more here than met the eye. He wished that Fred Stamm were with him, but he also had an urge to act without delay.

"I want to talk to Mr. Flandreau."

"Well . . ." She looked doubtful, glanced up the hall. "He's very busy. A shipment of bullion is in from abroad, and he's making test assays in his laboratory."

"Now," said Dan firmly. "Tell him I'm waiting."

[*Turn page*]

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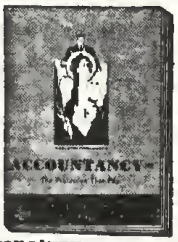

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She gave him a brief surprised look, and then turned and moved off along the corridor. As far as Dan could tell, she moved neither faster nor slower than usual. She vanished into a door, which closed silently behind her.

Dan waited. A minute passed. Two minutes . . . five minutes. He shifted from one foot to the other. He lighted a cigarette, dragged on it slowly. Ten minutes had gone.

Very little traffic passed up and down the corridor, and none of it in or out of the door she had last used. Dan knew that, because he had been watching it constantly. He ground out the butt under his heel. If the man were coming out, he'd be out by now. If he didn't intend to come out, he'd send his secretary out to say so. What the devil was going on? Fifteen minutes. . . .

WITH a muttered exclamation Dan started down the hall. There were only four doors. She had entered the third one on the right. Coming to it, he raised his hand to knock, but then changed his mind. He pushed it open and stepped into a small office.

It held some filing cabinets, two or three straight chairs, and two desks, one large and one small. Neither was occupied. In the opposite wall, facing him, was another door, also closed.

When he shoved the second door open, he faced a large square room cluttered with apparatus that was strange to him. A stone workbench ran along one side, littered with tools and bottles and specially designed scales. Crucibles of all sizes stood about, and long-handled tongs for handling them.

On the other side were two oil-fired muffle furnaces which to Dan looked like oversized ovens with a confusion of instruments and controls added. One was on. In it a couple of crucibles gave off a ruddy glow, and the blower made a steady hum in the air.

In the middle of the room a heavily built hand truck was loaded with thirty or forty gleaming bars of gold bullion. Into the surface of each was stamped a number, as well as a government seal and some other hieroglyphics indicating quality. Perhaps they had originally been piled in regular order.

They were now helter-skelter, as if someone had shifted them to find the one he sought.

The only man in the room turned from the furnace to face Dan. He wore a heavy canvas apron over his shirt, and dark-lensed goggles shielded his eyes against the intense glare of the furnace. The latter might have made recognition a little difficult, except that the upturned points of his black moustache marked him instantly for Dan. It was Flandreau.

"Who are you?"

Flandreau's right hand clutched a long pair of wrought iron tongs. His eyes glared through the dark goggles.

"Dan Barber. Police headquarters, Missing Persons. I've been waiting to have a talk with you."

"Well, you'll have to wait a little longer. Can't you see that I'm busy?"

But Dan refused to be put off. "I want to ask you about the 1.909 ounces of gold that you had Miss Wayne buy for you."

Flandreau sniffed. "Didn't she explain that to you?"

"I also want to ask you about the same quantity of gold we found inside the glass eye of a dead man named Pedro Bletti."

Flandreau seemed to stiffen from head to foot. The breath hissed between his teeth. "In—the glass eye?"

"Yes. He was fished out of the river, yesterday morning."

Flandreau swallowed, as if to collect himself, and then spoke slowly but firmly. "I never knew such a man. I am afraid I cannot help you much, but I will discuss your questions with you later. I will send Miss Wayne to let you know when I am finished here."

Dan's eye roved the room. "By the way, where is Miss Wayne?"

Flandreau shrugged. "I don't know. She went out somewhere."

Dan's muscles leaped under his skin. He knew a lie when he heard it. Holly Wayne had come in here, and she had *not* gone out, because he had been watching the only door into the suite. Yet she was nowhere visible in the laboratory. Where was she?

In the corner of the room was a large

[*Turn page*]

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built-in closet, with walls of brick reaching to the ceiling. The heavy door was metal-sheathed, and a large key protruded from its massive lock.

He took a step toward the closet door.

"Wait!" barked Flandreau. "Do you want this in your face?"

He had used the tongs to snatch up one of the crucibles from the interior of the furnace. As he held it at arm's length, Dan could see the heat waves rising from the molten, seething metal.

FLANDREAU'S hand quivered. A tiny drop spilled over the edge of the crucible to the floor. It hissed and simmered angrily on the cold concrete. What it would do on a man's skin. . . .

"What do you think you're doing, Flandreau?" demanded Dan.

"If you think you can spoil my game now—any of you—you're insane," growled the chemist. "Get in there with her!"

The crucible lurched threateningly. Dan shuddered. "You won't get away with this," he declared firmly.

"No? By the time they find you two, locked in the closet, they will never catch up with me. I killed Pedro to shut his mouth. You don't imagine I'd hesitate to kill you, too, do you?"

Balancing the crucible carefully, Flandreau stepped to the closet door. With his left hand he turned first the key, then the knob.

The door flew open. Holly Wayne plunged out. She crashed into Flandreau's left arm. He reeled back drunkenly. His right arm made a swooping motion, to keep his balance. The crucible slipped from the tongs. It curved upward, turned over in mid-air. In a shimmering, misshapen sheet the molten gold descended on Flandreau's head and shoulders.

His face dissolved in smoking, charred flesh. One terrible scream came from his lungs before the seething liquid burned in as far a his larynx. He collapsed, writhing. A frightful stench began to fill the room.

"Look out, Holly!" Dan seized her two arms, and hurled her back from the spreading puddle on the floor. It touched the toe

of his shoe, which started to smoke. Some had already touched her knee. He dragged her into the outer office and slammed the door behind him.

SOME hours later a mixed group sat about a round table up on the top floor. Dan, two officials of the Assay Office, Fred Stamm, and a jewel expert from the Customs Office. The latter held in his hand a glassy lump about the size of a walnut, on which he discoursed expertly. When he placed it on the table, it glinted green under the light.

"An emerald!" murmured Dan, still coping with his astonishment. "210 carats—1.909 ounces. And worth many thousand times as much as that amount of gold. What a place to hide it—inside a bar of bullion! Who do you suppose thought of that?"

"We'll never know," said Fred Stamm, "whether Flandreau and Pedro Bletti knew each other before last summer or not. By that time the swag from the Maragha robbery had been partially divided up, and Pedro had this stone. Worth a king's ransom, but absolutely unsalable in Europe. If he could get it into the U. S., though, and break it up, he was fixed for life."

"So he took Flandreau in the deal?"

"Probably. Flandreau had friends in the French Assay Service, in Paris, and it wasn't hard to get the stone cast into a bar of bullion. All the world's gold finds its way to Fort Knox, these days, and all the shipments from Europe come through New York. They're assayed right here for purity and weight. That was Flandreau's job."

"He must have known the bar number, and watched for it."

"Of course. Pedro got the correct amount of gold dust to replace the weight of the emerald, had it ready. When Flandreau recast the bar, you see, it would be that much lighter, and he would have to account for the last thousandth of an ounce.

"But just before the shipment arrived, he and Pedro had a falling out. Maybe they fought over the split, or maybe Flandreau had planned on cornering the whole for himself. At any rate, he killed Pedro, but

[*Turn page*]

LAW...

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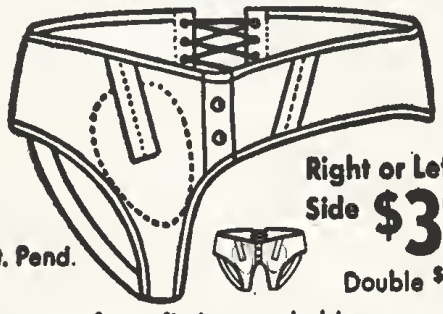

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then couldn't find where Pedro had hidden the little spoonful of dust. That made it necessary for Flandreau to use other means to lay hands on the right amount, which in turn made it possible for Dan, here, to trace back to the motive."

A telephone rang, over on a side table. One of the Federal men answered it. He listened for a moment, then turned.

"Report from Beekman Street Hospital. The burn on Miss Wayne's knee is superficial, will only leave a slight scar. She will be permitted visitors after four o'clock."

Dan glanced at his watch, and reached for his hat.

"Excuse me, gentlemen. I'm interested in a different kind of gold right now—and not the kind that comes out of a bottle, either, if I have any eye for blondes."

PUZZLE PAGE

(Answers to puzzles on page 111)

DETECTAGRAM

	R	A	I	D	S		S	O	L	A	R	
P	I	S	T	O	L		A	D	O	R	E	D
L	O	Y	O	L	A		L	O	O	T	E	R
A	T	L		E	N	T	E	R		U	L	E
N	E	U	K		D	I	P		A	R	E	A
E	R	M	I	N	E	S		S	W	O	R	D
			L	E	R		M	O	A			
J	A	I	L	S		D	O	O	R	W	A	Y
U	R	N	S		S	O	L		E	A	S	E
D	A	M		B	I	G	O	T		T	I	M
G	R	A	V	E	N		C	H	A	S	T	E
E	A	T	I	N	G		H	E	R	O	I	N
	S	E	A	T	S		S	E	N	N	A	

JAIL BREAK!

We didn't say that McMurda was too sensitive to return to his OWN cell—and that's the key to an otherwise impossible problem.

McMurda leaves his cell, goes to cell No. 1, kills its occupant, RETURNS TO HIS OWN CELL, then goes to cell No. 4. After that, it's easy to trace his route.

● ● ●

If you like puzzles like the jail break one, read CHECK YOUR WITS, by Jules Leopold, a book of fun for everyone—only 25c at all newsstands.

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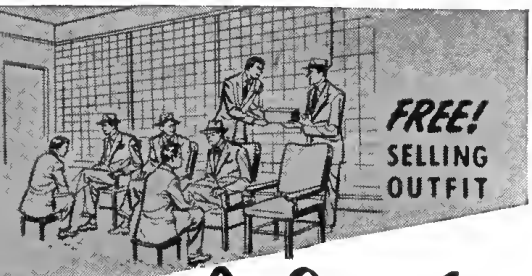

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